

FAITH AND QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS

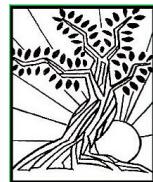
“Philosophical Thinking in a New Key”

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Books by Allan M. Savage

2001, A Phenomenological Understanding of Certain Liturgical Texts: The Anglican Collects for Advent and the Roman Catholic Collects for Lent. [University Press of America]

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2017, Religion and Governance: Re-thinking the American Perspective. (Lambert Academic Publishing)

2017, A Future for Disbelief? Philosophy in a Dehellenized Age with Implications for Theology. (Foreword: Patricia Shallow) [CreateSpace.com]

I hope I have not been misunderstood as though I were advocating an actual separation of scientific and philosophical work. On the contrary, in most cases future philosophers will have to be scientists because it will be necessary for them to have a certain subject matter on which to work — and they will find cases of confused or vague meaning particularly in the foundations of the sciences. But, of course, clarification of meaning will be needed very badly also in a great many questions with which we are concerned in our ordinary human life. Some thinkers, and perhaps some of the strongest minds among them, may be especially gifted in this practical field. In such instances, the philosopher may not have to be a scientist — but in all cases he will have to be a man of deep understanding. In short he will have to be a wise man.

Moritz Schlick

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Prefatory Note	1
2. Summation of “Faith and Queer Consciousness”	5
FAITH AND QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS	
3. Rationale	22
4. An Introduction to Faith and Queer Consciousness	25
5. Some Queer Stories	32
6. Where to Begin?	44
7. Now, Is There Sin in Queer Consciousness?	66
8. The Separation of Philosophy and Science	71
9. Consciousness: A Metaphysical Understanding	76
10. Consciousness and Faith	86
11. The Creed Dehellenized	95
12. Philosophy in a New Key	104
13. A Conscious Attempt at Constructing Queer Theology	114
14. Addendum: Holy Conversations	124
15. Eclectic Reflections	127
16. References	135

Prefatory Note

I almost subtitled this book, “And the prophetic philosophy of Leslie Dewart,” for reasons that should become apparent if the reader continues to read on. My decision to write this book has been inspired by Leslie Dewart’s (2016) own understanding of the outcomes of his efforts at philosophizing that, “if this work arouses the interest of open-minded scholars and stimulates them to investigate in depth the questions I raise here...and if it moves them to reset the compass of philosophy on a more promising course than I have been able to suggest, my fondest objectives in writing this book will have been attained.”¹

The reader must keep in mind that in this book I consider philosophy *as if* it were prophecy. That is to say, I have re-conceived philosophy as having the characteristics of prophecy and discuss the topic of Faith and Queer Consciousness accordingly. Although this is a rare approach within philosophy it has been attempted before. Werner Brock (1935) cites Nietzsche as an example of a “prophetic philosopher” whose thought is intended to enlighten all humanity.² To spare a lengthy discussion on their similarities and differences I present a comparison in chart form of the ideas inherent in prophetic philosophy, as I understand them. Ultimately, the reader will need to decide upon the merits and usefulness of my presentation, which is reserved to Western (Hellenized) philosophy.

¹ *Hume’s Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy*, p. 9.

² *Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy*, p. 59. “It must be always borne in mind, however, that the main task for the philosopher is not the search for an adequate manner of living, but the ceaseless attempt to enlighten himself and others concerning the problem of existence.”

Parallel Perspectives

Philosophy	Prophecy
The philosopher is the bearer and interpreter of knowledge.	The prophet is the bearer and interpreter of the word of God.
The philosopher responds to wonder about (or dissatisfaction with) life as “love of wisdom.”	The prophet responds to an irresistible divine call at some point in life.
Philosophers discuss “signs” of knowledge given their personal perspective.	Prophets are themselves “signs” of the divine will reflected in their own persons.
Human knowledge is expressed through the individual temperament and natural talents of the philosopher.	The divine message is expressed through the individual temperament and natural talents of the prophet.
The philosopher’s knowledge may be understood in his/her time, our time and a future time.	The prophet’s message relates to the our present and future, as well as the prophet’s own time.

Contra Perspectives

The philosopher’s words are his/her own.	The prophet’s words are simultaneously his or her own and not his or her own.
Philosophers discuss (dispute) among themselves, but respectfully so.	Prophets, held to be genuine, denounce those held to be spurious or frauds.
Philosophers arise within the human condition.	Prophets are sent to the people of God.

I begin his book with an opening quote and a closing quote from Jack Bonsor's (1998) article, "Homosexual Orientation and Anthropology: Reflections on the Category 'Objective Disorder,'" because Bonsor has appealed in his article to Leslie Dewart's philosophical perspective.³

I indicate the problematic character of Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology in view of evolutionary theory. Evolution of the human body is generally accepted. But what about human consciousness and intellect? Aquinas argued that humanity's intellectual functions require a subsistent, directly created soul. I suggest that the hypothesis of a subsistent and directly created soul is incommensurate with evolutionary theory and unnecessary. The major portion of this section treats an alternative explanation for the emergence of the human intellect. Leslie Dewart offers an explanation of how the human mind might have evolved. My aim is not to offer Dewart's work as definitive; I simply suggest that there are good reasons for adopting anthropological perspectives different from that of Aquinas. If such anthropologies can find a place in Catholic discourse, a space is opened for reconsidering the judgment that homosexual orientation is an objective disorder. The final section of the article considers some possibilities consequent on this opening.

Finally, let me assure the reader that I am not so naïve as to think my suggestions on this topic will be widely embraced. But it seems to me unreasonable to grant Aquinas's metaphysical anthropology an unquestioned hegemony within

³ Pp. 61, 83.

Catholic discourse. I entitled this last section ‘Possibilities.’ I have in mind the possibility of thinking about human nature in a manner consistent with contemporary science, the possibility of building theological anthropologies from within this perspective, the possibility of rethinking the CDF’s [Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith] judgment that homosexual orientation is objectively disordered, and the possibility of reconsidering ecclesial opposition to public structures that support homosexual persons. Finally, I have in mind the possibility that the authentic love of homosexual persons might indeed be a gift within the provident care of God.

§

Part One

SUMMATION

of

“FAITH AND QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS”

Note 1. Coming down from the trees

“Coming down from the trees” is a reference to the concept of biological evolution, a process which factors significantly into my discussion. In a nutshell, the object of discussion in this book is human nature and what it means to be humanly conscious. To be humanly conscious I take to mean that human nature is *immediately* intelligible to itself, that is, no external agency is required to inform me of my human status. Human consciousness is self-revealing and human evolution is guided by a conscious self-selection as the human organism exercises self-adjustment to its environment.

Humans must formulate their own meaningful identity. This need for identity qualifies all other wants and needs of an individual in a society or culture as the institutionalization of a group of individuals. Individual and social formulations of meaningful identity are arduous tasks for both the individual and society. Through conscious self-direction, freely undertaken, humans determine themselves. This means, according to Leslie Dewart, that self-determination, which at the higher levels of animal life enabled the organism to govern itself, has been transposed into a new key. Self-determination is a function of the organism’s awareness

of its purposiveness and of the means by which it might achieve its purpose.

This summation consists of three sections made up by combining the notions I discuss in the main text. The summary is discursive and I present it from the first-person point of view as much as possible. It does *not* follow the order in the main text, nor does it cover all the perspectives I discuss in the main text. In this summation I have avoided formal citations and references where possible and have presented my ideas in a more reader-friendly and hopefully less academic style. The reader will need to consult the main text for academic references and formal citations. The summary is intended to “cut to the chase” and invite readers to ponder and criticize my thoughts out of their own experience. Thereby they may readily reach their personal conclusions concerning issues of faith and queer sexuality that may be occupying their interest.

As well, this book is a small effort towards *re-integrating*, for our time, philosophy and theology which have stagnated for a variety of reasons. I follow Leslie Dewart’s perspective here in which he has undertaken an historical approach to account for the present situation. However, after following his reasoning in the matter, I do arrive ultimately at a different outcome.

Note 2. The prophetic character of philosophy

To my mind, Vatican II notwithstanding, philosophy ought to favour a *ressourcement*, rather than an *aggiornamento*. A re-thinking of the sources of ideas rather than a mere up-dating of them is to be the preferred approach. This is so because, according to Daniel Guerrière (1990), progress in philosophy is

ressourcement rather than advancement.⁴ I view philosophy as characteristic of a *prophetic* activity, not merely an epistemological activity. Failure to retain this prophetic notion accounts partially for philosophy's stagnation in contemporary thinking. As I see it the prophetic aspect, whatever there was of it, has been lost in current analytic and phenomenological philosophy. Of course, I refer to Western philosophy as it developed in Europe having been influenced by Hellenic principles and ideas.

I have reoriented my philosophical approach in this book. My perspective is not merely that of *homo faber*, or *homo creator*,⁵ but also includes the notion of "the thinker as prophet." This is not an original perspective. G. Lowes Dickinson (1932) anticipated somewhat my thinking when he wrote the following. "The quarrel of the philosopher with the [Hellenic] myths is not that they are not true, but that they are not edifying....Clearly, concludes the philosopher, our current legends need revision; in the interest of religion itself we must destroy the myths of the popular creed."⁶

The prophetic character of philosophy is not determined solely by an individual's ability to philosophize. The object of the philosopher's thinking also contributes to the prophetic character of philosophy, in the sense I mean it here. Werner Brock (1935) has identified four "objects" for the philosopher's musings that indicate a prophetic character. To my mind they are sufficiently significant to be reproduced here.

⁴ *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion*, p. 13.

⁵ I use these terms equivalently for my purposes. To modern thinkers they convey the notion that humans have the ability to create and control what surrounds them. Appius Claudius Caecus (c. 340 BCE-273 BCE) a Roman politician in his *Sententiae* wrote: *Homo faber suae quisque fortunae* (Every man is the architect of his destiny).

⁶ *Greek View of Life*, p. 50.

1. The importance of *technique*, which enables us to satisfy our physical wants and by which men are brought into closer external contact than ever before.
2. The importance of *economic processes*, by which men try to gain the means of supplying their needs, and which, still more than technique, link men together within a nation and within the world.
3. The importance of the *State* internally and externally: internally as the unit in which power over numberless human beings is concentrated, and in which men struggle in manifold groups and organizations for their share of power and for the preservation or alteration of their government; externally as the unit which, in alliance with, or in opposition to, other States, makes effective its concentrated power in a manner which cannot be foreseen or directed by any individual.
4. The importance of those *peoples outside of Europe* who, whether they have been formerly subjugated or awakened by Western culture and civilisation, have been trying since the middle of the nineteenth century and increasingly since the War to make their political power and their own civilisation effective, independently of, and possibly against, Europe.⁷



⁷ *Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy*, p. 118 (Brock's italics).

SUMMATION: First Section

This is a book on philosophy. And philosophy can serve theology as we theologians know. My thinking is philosophical and at the same time is related to theology. While the two are distinct within a religious context they are not unrelated as some contemporary philosophers might suggest. Therefore, I contend that philosophy, as an intellectual tool, when used within theological interpretation could help anyone seeking knowledge of queer issues in a religious context, should individuals look at themselves and perceive more than what lies on the surface of their experience. Should they take into account their evolutionary history, overcome the negative consequences of past failures in life, and subsequently reorient themselves to the future, they would be philosophizing *in a new key*. In this context, philosophizing in a new key means that the sexual peculiarities of human nature are to be recognized and respected. This recognition of sexual peculiarities and subsequent respect for human nature have significant consequences for the gay person.

To think in a new key is an exercise in existential philosophical consciousness. Through existential consciousness we gain more information about the world and ourselves than our senses alone can provide. I am not concerned here *how* we gain more information, but *that* we gain more information. We are born into a “life already in progress” without knowing the mechanics of the origin of life itself. The mechanics of the origin of life itself must be left to speculative thought. Thus, philosophizing in a new key begins existentially and critically in thinking about our life already in progress, and not speculating about the unknown origins of life. It is this existential and critical thinking as a point of departure that puts our thought process in a new key, and

in fact creates a “stream of consciousness” which defines our human specificity.

The world and all it contains, including its mystery, need not be intelligible in itself for us to understand it. It can be experienced as chaotic and we can still theologize consciously about the mystery of God from a human point of view. This is something mere animal consciousness cannot do. When we contemplate a mystery, from a theological point of view, this does not change the mystery itself, but only makes a difference to our interpretation of it. We learn from our experience of the mystery and re-arrange our life accordingly. When we do this consciously we experience this mystery theologically as somehow “other-than-us.” Thus critical theological understanding begins in philosophy.

I grant that philosophy, *of itself*, and alone, gives no reason to believe that human nature is destined to ascend to a higher plane of understanding than the human intellect can provide. That is to say, philosophy is not revelation. Such assent belongs to the experience of faith. However, philosophy arising from the human intellect does query the somewhat questionable success of the sciences in their interpretation of human nature. The sciences are purely secular activities and no theological transcendence is required in their interpretation.

Theologically, however, we relate to the meaning of the *logos* in the Christian scriptures. At its deepest philosophical understanding the *logos* as *our* word is able to express a religious mystery within the context of a concrete world. As well, our concrete world is the context for the revelation of God’s *logos*, as incarnated in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Further, understanding the *logos* in this manner allows us the potential of creating our own life-world, that is, our human world and express it to others — with or without God. Theologically then, we can become nothing less than co-

creators when our philosophy presents our self-understanding in a new key. My understanding of the origin and development of this status of co-creator is located in Dewart's (2016) insightful remark:

The conscious life of the individual...is played out against a cultural backdrop that is already part of the stage when the individual first comes upon the scene; the backdrop is the lexicon and the more or less well-integrated system of the propositions that add up to the society's accumulated lore, parts of which all individuals acquire as they learn to speak and think, becoming thus inducted into their culture and its ways of perceiving [humanity] and world.⁸

In the context of Queer Studies, it is theologically significant that whereas human beings are obviously culturally programmed, they can consciously re-write these cultural programmes. That is so since philosophy in a new key being conscious of human activity concentrates on *doing* something, not *being* something.

Our human world is not merely organized around natural events happening without purpose. There is purpose to our political, economic, religious and social construction of life. That purpose is based on our needs. Our conscious construction of queerness is a product of the ethical and moral choices we make in our day to day lives. Our contemporary consciousness of queerness is to be understood in contrast to the traditional Western consciousness of heterosexuality which has been inordinately influenced by Hellenistic or Ancient Greek philosophical thought.

The notion of queerness has recently come into being in Western society and consciously exposes certain practices that have mistakenly become regarded as inevitable. A queer consciousness (as I shall refer to the

⁸ *Hume's Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy*, p. 437.

phenomenon from now on) is better understood today through phenomenological philosophy, than classical philosophy. A queer consciousness arises within the experience of sexuality and often in a religious context which may be negative or positive. Initially, the moral and ethical principles that formerly held religious life together are often seen to be disintegrating as the traditional philosophical supports of western belief are undermined. Ethical and moral principles need to adopt a new philosophy in order to hold one's future religious life together.

A contemporary construction of queer consciousness is based on one's situation in life and not upon the natural/supernatural understanding inherent in traditional western theology. Queer consciousness is purposeful. By that I mean that its purpose is determined out of actual experience. Its purpose is to serve the future practical function of supplying appropriate norms for an individual's belief. Thus, queer consciousness provides an on-going corrective of the errors of past belief. It is a medicine; not merely a food, as it were. The danger for queer consciousness is that since our age is more scientific than philosophical secular psychology may, in fact, replace religious philosophy resulting in a deficient human understanding. However, Werner Heisenberg (1962) has noted that physical scientists "would never doubt that the brain acts as a physico-chemical mechanism if treated as such; but for an understanding of psychic phenomena we would start from the fact that the human mind *enters as object and subject* into the scientific process of psychology."⁹

As conscious beings, it often matters little to us how we are perceived by others. However, how we perceive

⁹ *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, p. 106 (my italics).

ourselves and what we believe ourselves to be and how we act is, in fact, very important to most of us. Through the same conscious activity by which we create the world of our choice and give it meaning we also create ourselves and become what we choose to make of ourselves, regardless of what others may make of us. Of course, our success in this endeavor depends on a host of personal abilities and talents. And there are those who have not sufficient strength to carry the process through. This often seems more the case among those who carry some secret that they perceive as “un-sharable.” i.e., being gay. With this “un-sharable” secret in place, they are often injured spiritually by their inability, either to go back to the previous forms of living, or to go forward to find some new satisfying life, as if they were in some sort of emotional paralysis. No matter what the sphere of intellectual or spiritual life — literature, art, science, politics, religion — a process of constant revision and readjustment is unavoidably imposed upon the individual. The beliefs given to us from tradition are not elastic enough to hold the new wine of queer consciousness, as it were. Philosophy today, undertaken by anyone willing to make the effort, is “thinking about thinking,” including thinking about sexual matters, and this has led to the realization of a queer consciousness.

If the census figures are correct, individuals who are queer and individuals who are philosophers, both are in a minority in our contemporary Western culture. However, queer consciousness, as a minority awareness in the past, has been given a new philosophical self-understanding and should gain more than a tolerated status in contemporary society. In addition to the sympathetic perspective of the social sciences on queerness, a new philosophical self-understanding on the part of queers to feel the consolation of society, both religious and civil, should contribute to the advancement of the acceptance

so often denied them.

Philosophy can only analyze what is present to an individual's consciousness. In these essays, I discuss what has become present to my consciousness during some stage in my life. I am aware that others, with similar experiences, may understand their experiences differently from me even though our experiences may be very similar. That would suggest to me that these individual's may not have critically examined their inherited beliefs. They rely on classical philosophy for interpretation of their experience in which individual personal evaluation plays little part since the answers to their questions have been already given to them.

Some queer individuals who want to be accepted by the Catholic Church have attempted to find answers that justify their homosexuality, with the hope of undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully. To achieve such acceptance, even limitedly, would require a change in philosophy from an inherited understanding to one in which a critical conscious interpretation of experience plays a significant role. As I view it, in order to maintain any hope of undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully queer individuals will need to embrace a phenomenological philosophy in order to achieve that goal since it is not possible from a classical perspective. Embracing a phenomenological philosophy may be increasingly difficult if theologians like Robert Barron continue to dominate the theology of the American Church. Any queer consciousness that is currently legitimized by sociological and cultural standards is threatened by the theological understanding of the church Barron (2015) represents.

What I would like to do...is to engage in a reading of our American culture from the standpoint of the assimilating church, showing how the community gathered around Jesus Christ ought

to relate to the positive and negative elements within that culture. I am consciously turning away from the dominant liberal model of analyzing ‘the situation’ in order to put it into correlation with the ‘answers’ coming from tradition; instead, I will endeavor to show why the church must resist certain features of the culture and precisely how it can adapt others to itself.¹⁰

Initially, this may sound positive to advocates for a queer philosophy and theology. But, for Barron, queerness will be among those “certain features of the culture” to be resisted, as he attempts to relate the church to American culture through retaining a classical theological understanding.

From a Christian perspective, Western philosophy generally accepts that the traditional purpose of sexual activity is to produce new life in the form of future generations. Gay sexual activity, of its nature, cannot produce new life. According to traditional theologians and religious philosophers sexual activity without this goal is a “death threat,” as it were, and frustrates God’s purpose, and hence is sinful. Phenomenologically, a sense of sin is recognized within the biblical perspective as “missing the mark.” Often in adjusting to the world as it actually is, humans “miss the mark” in their understanding of what is right and what is wrong and need to re-adjust themselves to the world in which they actually live. Since philosophy determines and assigns meaning and human values to experience there is a need for an appropriate philosophy to underpin all the social sciences and technologies which influence our choices.

Morality is not a static quality, but a dynamic quality of human life. Acting consciously, modern individuals

¹⁰ *Exploring Catholic Theology. Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, p. 298.

determine their personal ethical norms internally from external experience. Acting consciously, they tend not to conform to any pre-existing external norms governed by a sense of duty. For them to accept traditional theology as a charter for doctrinal conservatism, fearful of any change, would be a misreading of the consciously creative nature of phenomenological philosophy and theology. At this point, I must introduce a word on my understanding of consciousness and its place, or function within philosophy. Consciousness is not a philosophy in itself, but is a quality of one's mind when it undertakes philosophical thinking. This quality of mind produces different interpretations of experience as the meaning of one's life evolves and develops.

Experiences of a queer nature give rise to a new object for inquiry in theology. Within a phenomenological theological perspective, there is no recognition of a "divine plan" for all humanity. Phenomenological philosophy, within a queer consciousness, challenges the individual to reinterpret the situation without using traditional formulas. Let me be clear that I am not seeking to develop a philosophy for a universal interpretation of human experience. But, only to develop an acceptable philosophy for the person who desires to act morally and religiously in particular situations of queer experience. In short, I suggest a philosophical tool for queer use which, at the same time, may be helpful to "straight" thinkers in understanding human sexuality.

My philosophical approach to the subject of queer consciousness is phenomenological, which means I include myself as a participant in the interpretation of what I observe and experience. A contemporary principle to be reconsidered, in my view, is that human experience is understandable only in opposition to animal experience. Philosophically, human experience tends to

be interpreted solely as an ex-animal experience, not as an ex-angelic or ex-divine experience. However, as I attempt to show, the interpretation of human experience has evolved intelligibly in relation to the presence of God, and not solely in relation to the manner of animal experience. Hence, sin remains an issue for the queer consciousness.

Queer consciousness is at the point of determining its own theological path by accepting judiciously and wisely elements from traditional theology and integrating them into its experience. Queer consciousness has succeeded, to some degree, in attracting the theological attention of the church's Pastoral Care Ministry for individuals in the church, but not the church's dogmatic understanding. A more difficult task for the church in the future will be in facing the sensitive problems of doctrinal and dogmatic theology in queer consciousness.

SUMMATION **Section Two**

In the not-so-serious intellectual climate of this age many of the philosophical perspectives undertaken to seek clarification and knowledge of ourselves are likely to be short-lived in terms of the longevity of ideas. In other words, these philosophical perspectives might become "trendy" for a while.

To know myself better is a prime purpose of my philosophy. Generally, philosophers seek in the notion of God (or in some sort of other absolute principle) the reconciliation of a conflict felt within themselves, as well as, among themselves, and the world at large. And, they seek to bring about this reconciliation through seeking the union of experience. This, I suggest, may be understood as a philosophical misdirection carried over into modern philosophy due to the Hellenistic approach

in philosophy. On a personal level, my experience indicates clearly that evolution tends to diversity, not uniformity.

My mind is a function of my brain, my mind is a mental activity that I recognize as distinct from my physical body. My conscious mind, that is, my conscious mental state, is literally a meta-physical activity, not a physical one. However, this mental meta-physical activity takes place *within* my physical body. That is, to my knowledge, it does not take place without a body. In the process of thinking, there is no need to identify contemporary scientific understanding as philosophy. Nor is there need to do one without the other, that is independently. Each has existed, and continues to exist, separately. Science and philosophy are of two distinct orders. They are not *connected* but in a *relationship*. The rational conclusion I ultimately draw from their relationship is that my consciousness cannot be identical with anything physical, because there is no *causal* connection between my mental and the physical states. From experience, I have no reason to believe that one causes the other.

In my consciousness I generate a meaningful metaphysics through a phenomenological interpretation of experience, not a classical one. There are profound theological implications in deepening my consciousness concerning my philosophy of God. In my philosophy of God I distinguish between *conformity* and *fidelity* to the presence of God in my life. My personality reflects my conscious awareness of who I am philosophically as I recast my faith (the meaning of religion) and my actions in terms that do not imply God's absolute power over me, nor my inordinate submission to God's will.

My experience, which may be negative or positive, I interpret through a philosophy of consciousness. For any positive development within my consciousness a

supportive context for human growth is required; the negative aspects of life, fear, despair, suffering, guilt and death notwithstanding. In a supportive context of human growth I consciously heighten my self-awareness with the aid of both philosophy and science, philosophy being the preferred discipline. In my philosophy, as I think about thinking, these questions arise: Will the evolution of my consciousness occur without my active participation, that is, merely passively? Or, with it, that is, actively? To what extent is the evolution of my consciousness a part of a “do-it-yourself” enterprise? Has a Christian community the responsibility to promote an evolutionary development of its doctrine? Such questions preoccupy me in these essays.

My awareness of the presence of God in my life is identical with the *possibility* of a new life over and beyond the life I already have. My present God-given life was given without consulting me. (I did not ask to be born.) In contrast, any *new* life God offers me is offered in consultation with me. That is, I must accept that new life consciously and freely for it to be viable in me. It may be that the religious experience of my new life may be an ultimate experience, but it is not the *final* experience.

In keeping with the thrust of these essays, a challenge arising within the understanding of contemporary human sexuality is not how to defend a concept of straight sexuality against a concept of gay sexuality. Rather, the challenge is how to take advantage of the evolution of one’s self-awareness of acting sexually in order to improve upon the understanding of sexuality in human beings. Once I understand that God has a special relationship with me as a sexual person, whether gay or straight, I must give that relationship a meaning that truly reflects God’s image and likeness in my day-to-day affairs.

SUMMATION

Section Three

As a theologian, I must find a way of making space for various kinds of theological discourses in the church and not rely solely on the classical theological one. Like many other students down through history, I began serious philosophical questioning during my undergraduate years while studying classical philosophy at a Catholic college. Earning a Doctor of Theology degree marked the beginning of a new chapter in my theological thinking that would lead to the authoring of a variety of books. Within a sense of rootlessness, I began searching for a *new philosophical genre* to interpret my experience. Having discovered phenomenology and making a subsequent adjustment in my relationships with God meant that I had “come of age,” as it were, in living out my religious life. God was not totally responsible for everything anymore. To this day, I remain a co-responsible agent with God for my life.

My theology, arising within my religious life, is nothing less than the *interpretation* of my personal, but not necessarily private, experience. My theological understanding is not an *explanation* of my experience in scientific terms. Rather, it is an interpretation of my experience in philosophical terms. Given my existential understanding, I recognize that certain negative experiences are present in my life which are fear, despair, suffering, guilt and death. Yet, these experiences affect only one aspect of my existence, my human aspect (*a partis hominis*). They do not constitute God’s presence in my life (*a parte Dei*) which casts out fear, replaces despair with hope, alleviates suffering, absolves guilt, and overcomes death. Philosophically, *a partis hominis* and *a parte Dei* constitute a relational *unity*, not concrete

union, within my conscious experience of God. God is present to my life, whether I am straight or queer.

In inquiring into queer consciousness I engage both the world I inherited and the world I have constituted for myself. I find it significant that traditional Christian theology has been constructed only upon the experience of straight individuals. There is no room for “the exception to the rule,” as it were. In my theology I accept God’s revelation within the ecclesial community in a queer-friendly way. My theology is based upon the presumption that a positive relationship between God and me has actually been established. It is a relationship of love. It is a love of the type that that meets my needs and furthers my spiritual growth. Such love is not romantic. This love consists in a higher level of consciousness within a relationship with a spiritual presence that first loved me.

Finally, as a further clarification of my thinking, my approach to queer theology is not to be equated with religious studies as a discipline addressing queer consciousness, even though this seems to be trending in the universities and our contemporary culture. Queer theology is too personal for that approach. The difference is that religious studies, being an academic discipline, attaches to the social order. Whereas, theology, being a religious philosophy of life, attaches to the person. In constructing my theology, I realized that I need to become an agent for change both within myself and within my environment. I cannot remain passive and accept uncritically the ideas and beliefs inherited from my past. The question has become, for me at least, how to interpret through satisfactory concepts my queer experience while remaining faithful to my Christian calling. Such is the purpose of this collection of essays.

Part Two

FAITH AND QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS

Rationale

The idea behind this book on faith and queer consciousness is to get the reader to “think things through.” But, in conscience, I must advise the reader that this is a non-professional undertaking inspired by Leslie Dewart’s initial specialized undertaking as he described his efforts at inquiring into the real-life problem of understanding the Christianity of his day. That is, I wonder if Christianity in particular, and religion in general will consciously undertake to direct their own evolution or, continue to evolve at an obsolete rate and in a pre-critical mode. In this work, I present a provocative and somewhat unorthodox approach to queer consciousness hoping to encourage philosophical interest in queer studies and not just the continuance of a questionable clinical-style explanation of the phenomenon. Through phenomenological philosophy I contemplate relationships, not connections, that the individual establishes to make a meaningful world for himself or herself. Individuals are participants in constructing their worlds, not just observers of this world.

A personal appreciation of queer issues and contemporary philosophical values have motivated me to compose this collection of essays. My writing is an activity of my mind, that is to say, I investigate what it means in our contemporary society to be conscious of being sexually queer. I, like all thinking persons, organize the experience of my every-day world around certain values, religious and secular, from a subjective point of view. I do not simply undergo experiences in life

without ranking them according to a personal set of values. The “facts of life” are simply that, until I give them meaning. My every-day world, is often understood intuitively, and experienced as a collection of inter-related encounters, animate and inanimate, queer and straight.

Today, my life reflects religious values which are acquired beliefs arising from my interpretation of experience. As I recall in hindsight, my original inclination was to disbelieve in anything as religious. This eventually changed, however, through a mature self-reflection and I recognized a previously hidden spirituality — even though I lacked a vocabulary to express that awareness.

Asking a question for clarification about queerness implies that I know something of it already even if the origin of my knowledge is ambiguous. I know that “queerness” appears initially foreign to straight individuals and that neither group, gay or straight, knows what kind of interpersonal relationships future consciousness will reveal. Here, I believe, a phenomenological philosophy can help clarify the issues that will surface in their relationships. In these essays, I suggest that the understanding of our human nature as ex-animal, be subordinated to an understanding of our human nature as ex-divine. This change in our philosophical understanding will effect a change in our theological understanding and possibly make room for understanding queerness in reflecting the “image and likeness of God.”

In phenomenological understanding, “God” has no meaning in itself. That persons give meaning to God and to God’s creation is evidenced in the pre-scientific religious myths of the Pentateuch. The traditional philosophical understanding of the Pentateuch had revealed an un-critical, but satisfactory meaning of the

every-day human world, until the advent of the scientific method of understanding. Since a relationship between science and philosophy exists in which science *explains* and philosophy *interprets* human experience the interpretation of the Pentateuch has changed. The role of philosophy in thinking things through is important because philosophy prevents science from dehumanizing humanity, or entrapping humanity in its creaturely existence. Phenomenological philosophy discloses a qualitative transcendence to human experience (and ultimately a co-creator status for the individual) which may make room for an appropriate theological understanding of queer consciousness.

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AN INTRODUCTON TO FAITH AND QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS

My intention is to discuss the process of a philosophical formation of a queer consciousness within the Christian religious tradition. One's consciousness is not formed merely out of ordinary experience, but also out of philosophical values and beliefs. Thus, queer consciousness is not a pre-determined phenomenon, rather it is a product of the ethical and moral choices we make existentially. Queer consciousness is to be contrasted to the traditional Western consciousness which has been inordinately influenced by Hellenistic, that is, Ancient Greek philosophical thought. Leslie Dewart's efforts at "dehellenization of thought" is his attempt at understanding the philosophical construction of religion, and an attempt to formulate a new philosophical construction of consciousness. To my mind, his new philosophical understanding of consciousness may give rise to a new theological understanding. His book *The Future of Belief* is devoted to this question.

I undertake my discussion of queer consciousness within the context of the relationships that have been recognized since the advent of existential philosophy at the beginning of the 20th Century. Queer consciousness exposes those existential practices within Hellenistic philosophy that have mistakenly become regarded as inevitable and it attempts to correct them. This correction occurs more favourably within a phenomenological philosophical understanding, than through a classical philosophical understanding. The phenomenological approach to interpreting my experience is significant for theology since it consists in interpreting my experience *within* the presence of God, not outside of the presence of God, which is the "alpha and the omega" of reality.

Schematically (and crudely) but effectively represented, this may be illustrated as: “God = A [*me being within God*] Ω,” that is, my experience does not take place *vis à vis* God, but rather, as living within God. My experience arises within the alpha and omega and may be negative or positive, which in turn effects any construction of my consciousness, queer or otherwise.

The moral and ethical principles that traditionally held my Western religious life together often seem to be disintegrating as the classical supports of belief are being undermined. However, if I give new meaning to my experience I enter into a fresh realm of philosophical discourse which amounts to an advanced intellectual activity reserved to human beings. In the process of constructing a queer consciousness philosophically I contemplate metaphysical concepts arising within my existential relationships phenomenologically. This leads me to suggest that our present day theological and moral problems are simply the logical outcome of the unresolved issues of the so-called Modernist crisis and these problems need to be recognized as such.

A positive queer consciousness cannot be formed in a defensive and self-isolating context. For queer consciousness to undertake a humanizing role it needs a supportive environment. It needs the instruction and the encouragement of other believing individuals in a mutual relationship. Queer consciousness arises out of one’s situation in life and not out of the natural/supernatural schema of traditional western theological understanding. Queer consciousness engages emotion, feeling, and intuition, and also enables the faithful to encounter “that which is transcendent” since human consciousness extends the mind beyond sensible (and metaphysical) experience.

Any conscious understanding of “spiritual growth” means a change in an individual’s subjective awareness

of that individual's actual being, not a change in the objective reality of what is, or was, experienced. In short, my experience of God does not change God. But I change. From this perspective, queer consciousness is mainly a continuing corrective of past interpretations. Thus, my queer consciousness of God is a medicine for healing and not a food for nourishment, as it were. The danger for a philosophical understanding of queer consciousness is that the contemporary age is more psychological than philosophical in its self-understanding of Western culture. And the danger is that secular psychology may replace religious philosophy. Throughout our lifetime we humans are much occupied with self-analysis and self-synthesis, the products of a scientific methodology. We cannot help it; such is our nature. But, it is not our total nature for faith (which is the understanding we give to religion) also constitutes our human nature.

Many of us in reflecting upon our childhood, after having been given a new toy, often took it apart to learn of its composition, to criticize its structure, and perhaps in some manner to try to improve upon it. This habit has not deserted most of us as we grew to adulthood. Instead of toys, however, systems, ideas, creeds, philosophies, received beliefs, and religions occupy our attention and require interpretation. Queer consciousness undertakes much the same approach as it exams the language and concepts that have proved to be, but may no longer be, fruitful for one's faith.

As conscious beings, it may matter little to us how we are perceived by others. However, how we perceive ourselves and what we believe ourselves to be and how we act matters a great deal. Through the same activity by which we create the world of our choice and give it meaning we also can create ourselves and become what we choose to make of ourselves regardless of what others

may recognize in us. Of course, our success in this endeavor depends on a variety of personal abilities and talents.

The effects produced upon believing adults in leaving the childlike understanding of religious beliefs given in the catechism are undoubtedly disconcerting and uncomfortable. As in every process of transition from one “resting-place” to another, there are those who have not sufficient strength to carry this process through. For some this inability could lead to an “uncompromising belief” on their part. Werner Heisenberg (1962) records this possibility with respect to new philosophical ideas within the study of contemporary physics.¹¹ Many individuals are often hurt spiritually by their inability either to go back to former ways of living, or to go forward to find something satisfying. However, no matter in what sphere of intellectual or spiritual life — literature, art, science, politics, religion — a process of constant revision and readjustment is unavoidably imposed upon every person.

Growth in our knowledge, our self-awareness, or consciousness, heightens and reveals to us more and more about the hidden source of our self-understanding.

¹¹ *Physics and Philosophy: The Revolution in Modern Science*, p. 204. “We cannot close our eyes to the fact that a great majority of the people can scarcely have any well-founded judgment concerning the correctness of certain important general ideas or doctrines. Therefore, the word ‘belief’ can for this majority not mean ‘perceiving the truth of something’ but can only be understood as ‘taking this as the basis for life.’ One can easily understand that this second kind of belief is much firmer, is much more fixed than the first one, that it can persist even against immediate contradicting experience and can therefore not be shaken by added scientific knowledge. The history of the past two decades has shown by many examples that this second kind of belief can sometimes be upheld to a point where it seems completely absurd, and that it then ends only with the death of the believer.”

From the depths of this source of self-knowledge, or consciousness, come many startling revelations about being human. It is ironic that a “heightened” consciousness reveals the “depths” of our personal being. A heightened consciousness reveals that the beliefs given to us in a former time are not elastic enough to hold the wine of new philosophical understanding, as it were. Our new knowledge, then, may lead to a new understanding of being queer.

My motivation in collecting these essays arises from the famous saying of Socrates that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” Whereas Socrates may have been conscious of his own death which caused him to wonder about life, I am motivated to examine the novelty and significance of certain issues in Queer Studies and offer some philosophical consolation to those who may be suffering due to their queer personality. To my mind, to alleviate suffering in one’s own life, or in the lives of others and to offer consolation makes life worth living. This book, or better, collection of essays is more about raising one’s personal awareness of the *philosophical options* in understanding issues of individual queerness, than campaigning for the social legitimacy of queerness in the public forum. Although intended to raise individual personal awareness, possible changes in the public attitude cannot be ruled out. Usually, when individuals change their minds and beliefs, society changes accordingly.

In a comment in some location Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) distinguished between philosophy as a “school of thought” within universities and “philosophy in the universal sense,” that is, thinking not as reserved to the academy, if my memory of history serves me correctly. In these essays I am concerned with philosophy in the universal sense, more than as a school of thought. As a result, I have kept formal references to professional

or academic philosophy to a minimum. Today philosophy undertaken by anyone willing to make the effort must be “thinking about thinking.” If the statistical figures are correct, individuals who are queer and individuals who are philosophers, constitute minority groups in our contemporary Western culture. Thus, a queer philosopher would be a minority on two counts. Ironically, as philosophy is being placed “on the back burner,” within both the public forum and in the universities, Queer Studies, on the other hand, is being placed “on the front burner” within both the public forum and universities.

The lack of a religious requirement within contemporary philosophical understanding leads ultimately to secular science and technology dominating the day in all matters of human understanding. As is, the contemporary Christian world has literally become “disenchanted.” As a visible minority within society, queers with a religious disposition require a positive philosophical self-understanding in order to experience more than a tolerated social status. In addition to the approach of the social sciences to gay orientation, a non-Hellenistic philosophical self-understanding is needed for queers to feel the acceptance by society, both religious and civil, so often denied them.

With no other agenda in mind than helping other philosophers, both queer and straight, to deepen their self-understanding through a new, if yet unorthodox philosophical approach to human consciousness, and to help queer persons to integrate, to the greatest degree possible, their social lives into the main stream of contemporary culture, I offer these essays for consideration to interested individuals. However, a *caveat*: The observation concerning social integration made by Curtis Kularski (2011) is not to be overlooked. He cautions: “Social invisibility would result in a decline

of social movements for gays and lesbians, resulting in essentially a stagnation of progress towards equality.”¹²

If, in my “queer efforts,” straight philosophers find in their ordinary profane experience a greater depth of consciousness concerning queer issues and queer individuals find some consolation by living in good conscience within a hostile environment among those who “know no better,” I will be satisfied.

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¹² *Gay Invisibility vs Gay Identity*, p. 3.

SOME QUEER STORIES

My research in this collection of essays began with the reading of a selection of gay authors who published accounts of their “coming out” stories. This essay, of course, is not necessary to the philosophical understanding of queer consciousness. These particular stories simply provide some background for readers unfamiliar with the variety of gay experience within which a queer consciousness arises. However, for my purposes, I wondered if there was a common philosophical or theological thread that could be discerned within their stories. I have purposely chosen authors who spoke of the affects of their religious upbringing on their queer experience, at least implicitly. In all the stories I present below, I am solely responsible for the interpretation of the authors’ accounts and apologize in advance for any inaccurate rendering.

Reflections of a Rock Lobster by Aaron Fricke

Written in 1981, Aaron made two significant statements in the Preface of his book. The first is in response to the question: “Why, then, am I gay?”

I think we are on the wrong track to spend too much time on this question. A more important question is: Why do so many people fear anyone who is different from them and thus label them sick or evil? But people never ask that. Instead they ask: ‘Then why did you chose homosexuality?’ I didn’t choose homosexuality: homosexuality chose me. People do not wake up in the morning and say, ‘Gee, I think I’ll be homosexual.’ The only choice I had was whether to nurture or stifle my homosexual feelings. I merely chose not to be forced into ‘acceptable’ social conduct.

People also ask, ‘What is it that you hate about yourself that made you become a homosexual?’ What a ridiculous question! I never had a low self-esteem that would make me gay. At one point, though, the reverse happened. Being homosexual led me to have a low self-esteem when I first became aware of society’s attitudes about homosexuality.

Throughout Aaron’s story the role of fear of the unknown is evident. The fear is on the part of others around him, not on Aaron’s part.¹³ Aaron recounts selected memories of his childhood sexual encounters. In childhood, he did what came “naturally” with no feelings of guilt. These natural feelings, however, were never mentioned to adults. In the experience of growing up, guilt was imported from the outside, he notes. He relates a few instances in which he remembers this occurring. One was his sister’s reaction to his spontaneous comment on the “anatomical proportions of Batman.” Reaction: “Cheryl freaked out.” In grade one there was the regular group “fun” sessions in the school lavatory, in which all who were involved understood that these sessions were never to be discussed with adults. Being caught and punished by the mother of a male friend for “touching” him during a sleepover was an additional event that reinforced his guilt from the outside.

Aaron had learned to refrain from speaking about his gay feelings as a self-defensive move, but that was soon replaced by fear. As time went on fear stole the luxury of the lavatory group encounters and he increasingly avoided them. Discovery of his mother’s anti-homosexual attitude made things worse. Becoming aware of his own sexuality came as a trauma to his self-image.

¹³ Such fear on the part of others is discussed by Jim Bishop (2016) in his unpublished PhD thesis, “Authoritarianism and Fear as Components of Dysfunction in Contemporary Catholicism,” (North-West University, Potchefstroom).

So he hid his homosexuality from others, but never from himself. He could not lie to himself.

Among some of his friends, as their pre-adolescent homosexuality changed to adolescent heterosexuality, he found that they were becoming unlike him. He found himself, somewhat unexpectedly, alone. His fear deepened as he found it increasingly difficult to communicate his feelings to anyone. He wanted more than sexual stimulation as he was growing up. The satisfaction gained from earlier relationships no longer satisfied him. In high school, he hid his real feelings from others to avoid the suffering and pain associated with the person he knew he was. He discovered that he was reacting to how others saw him as a gay person. Confusion, not self-hatred, was the result. For some reason there never was an attempt to escape his fears via drugs or alcohol, for which he has remained grateful.

As a teenager, when opportunity came to tell someone that he was gay, he could not do it. However, he met a friend, with whom he fell in love, who was involved with Dignity, a Catholic gay organization. As a result there was a change in his attitude and he began to challenge the prejudices he had grown up with. He sensed a new feeling of spiritual love for this friend who had suffered, and was suffering, like himself. “Paul and I were lovers in the true sense of the word; I felt as if we spent each waking moment together, either physically or in spirit.”

With Paul, there was no sexual activity, given that their love was spiritual. That was all Aaron needed at that time. Besides, at sixteen and a half years of age he was becoming aware that sexual activity, should be reserved to mature adults. Eventually, he and Paul separated but their friendship never ended. Aaron remained grateful for the help given to him at the time by Paul. During these

years he never advertised his homosexuality but would be open about it if someone asked.

Much of the rest of Aaron's story details the events leading up to taking his boyfriend to the High School Prom. In school most students would not care what he did, as long as they were not bothered by him. Aaron was still not, however, able to tell his mother of his homosexuality. Fearful of losing her love, he did not want her pity. It was during these events that he realized that his homosexuality was only one aspect of his personality. In fact, the label, "gay" expresses the one facet of his personality that is most misunderstood. He came to realize that other factors determined his value and dignity as a human being, not merely his sexual preference.

The challenges, difficulties and issues surrounding the decision to sue the school for not allowing him to take his boyfriend to the Prom are thoroughly detailed in the book. Positive and negative reactions, before the Prom, during the Prom and after the Prom are faithfully recounted. Aaron evaluates his experiences at the conclusion of the book in an Afterword. A sense of fear and hostility opened the book and the same sense of fear and hostility remains at the conclusion of the book, as Aaron has maintained (although not as sever, it seems). However, and without laying blame on heterosexuality, he writes: "I live with pride every day of my life now. Pride in the idea that my openness can set an example for all the people about the benefits of being open."

***On Being Gay* by Brian McNaught**

Brian compiled this book in 1988 which he intended for a broader audience. In their Foreword to the book, Andrew Mattison and David McWhitter write, very significantly to my mind, that "being gay is far more than

being physically attracted to persons of the same gender. It is a way of being in the world and Brian McNaught captures that for us.”

In an open letter to Anita Bryant, the American singer popular in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, which is the first essay in the book, Brian presents a series of points for her to consider.¹⁴ He observes, first that “Before we can begin to love ourselves, which I believe is crucial for sound mental health and total union with God, we have to root out the negative stereotypes with which we were raised, and begin to build positive self-images.” Subsequently, “Once a person has learned to be himself or herself, being gay becomes a gift and life becomes an opportunity to explore and celebrate.”

As a gay person, he approached scripture with the same interest and excitement as a heterosexual. In psychological interviews conducted when he planned to enter the seminary he was told there was no problem with his sexual orientation. The problem was with a hostile world. Doctors and the theologians of his church told him he was a “constitutional” homosexual, which was to be distinguished from a “transitional” homosexual. As a constitutional homosexual his orientation was set before he was old enough to know what was going on. Young children cannot label their homosexual feelings due to a lack of understanding and lack of a vocabulary to talk with an adult family member. This is today’s tragedy. In his own life, Brian defied every stereotype in his parents’ eyes as a young homosexual. He appeared “straight.” After a suicide attempt, he never again lived his life based upon the expectations of others.

Brian was working at a Catholic newspaper when he came out. His spiritual life, work life and social life then

¹⁴ In 1977, Anita Bryant campaigned successfully to have gay rights legislation rescinded in Dade County, Florida. In 1998 the rights legislation was re-enacted, I understand.

became honest, he maintains. Shortly after coming out he concluded that social and political games are for people that cannot be themselves. According to McNaught, sometimes humans can be their own worst enemies by oppressing themselves. Not everything humans produce is positive. Gay camp culture is oppressive he maintains. This culture, claimed as uniquely gay, “is more the deposits of a heterosexually polluted river, left upon the banks of history, than it is any real expression of what we are and where we are going,” he says in the book.

The question arises: Are gays comfortable in talking about God in a gay setting? He concludes that many people who insist upon maintaining ties with their religious institutions provide us with the finest examples in modern history of martyrs for the faith. He made this statement in 1978 ten years after the foundation of the Metropolitan Community Churches in 1968.

In years past, he says, as a white person he has watched black friends straighten their hair, struggle with word pronunciation different from their own and worship in a style which for them lacked meaning. All this to ask: “How much of my life is an attempt to prove to the Church that I am still worthy of its praise?” When straight people say that gay people are outside of God’s plan, gays tend to prove to them that they can be better Catholics, Protestants and Jews, than heterosexuals. This is the way gays continue to work to prove their worth to straight people, he notes.

Brian concludes the first section of his collection of essays with a sentiment that is evident throughout the balance of the book. “I want to go to my grave knowing...that I have died as a gay man and who fully understood, appreciated and celebrated his homosexuality.” He entitled subsequent sections of his book: Growing Up Gay, Friends and Lovers, The Journey Forward, and Celebration.

***A Passionate Engagement* by Ken Harvey**

Ken committed his thoughts to paper in 2010 and although writing from memory he truthfully acknowledges that he has sometimes written keeping the spirit rather than the letter of people's words in mind. I found this a candid and helpful admission.

He did not recognize his early attraction to males as sexual, but he recognized that his unexplainable sexual arousal at urinals, or in gym class, was somehow wrong. He recalls, as a pre-adolescent he searched in the dictionary for "homosexual." It was defined as an illness, with electric shock treatment as a cure — a treatment which induced fear in him and added to the unpleasantness of his pre-adolescent sexual years. He remained ignorant of gay history growing up and only as adult, during therapy, did he learn of the history of the gay movement.

His family life was "hostile" to homosexuality, his parents being ignorant of gay issues. Further, they showed no affection within their mutual relationship. He learned about the possibility of "love" in a gay family context when legal briefs petitioning for gay marriage contained words like, "support," "joy," and "commitment," which he never experienced at home.

In fact, being gay and religious were incompatible states when he was growing up. His traditional Catholic up-bringing concerning sin and sex negatively reinforced his guilt feelings. Prayer failed him in removing the feelings he was having which the church said deserved punishment. He left the church after college graduation, but continued to confront the church as an institution on political and social issues pertaining to gays.

In childhood, God was a "spy" in his life with the power to read his mind and know everything he was

doing. Being unworthy of a spiritual life and petrified of God's power did nothing but intensify his homosexual awareness and anxiety. Before he was 30 he had come to accept that gays had no spiritual home. However, this later changed and he was married in a gay-friendly church.

Ken was never desirous of moments of notorious visibility. He had some bad experiences when others recognized his hidden homosexuality. However, he does admit that at the time of writing his book he has been visible as a gay person for over twenty years. He came out of the closet at thirty-four years of age. It was the emotional pain, not any physical pain that kept him in the closet. Given that he could not love properly as long as he was in the closet, he retains regrets not being able to help other gay students suffering as he had suffered.

Having no experience within the gay world, Ken's coming out was a slow, halting process. Even on one occasion, while standing outside the Arlington Street Church in Boston, he doubted that he had authentically come out even to himself.¹⁵ Fear still paralyzed him.

Among all the issues and experiences that framed his coming out experience, after reading his book, I conclude that the topic of marriage was the most significant for him. Still wanting to avoid visibility, a self-styled (non-legal) marriage/exchange of rings in his living room, he considered to be sufficient. When the possibility of a legal gay marriage to Bruce, his partner, became socially acceptable, feelings of anger, resentfulness and fear were provoked from many quarters — including the Church. With this possibility of marriage he and Bruce were becoming increasingly visible all to Ken's dislike.

¹⁵ Arlington Street Church is reputed to be the first church in the United States to celebrate a legally recognized same-sex marriage on 17 July, 2004.

However, about this time he realized that he had come a long way from his early days as a gay youth. Once having left family and his hometown he realized that he had, in fact, begun this departure (psychologically) many years before. Subsequently, he became politically involved in order to educate youth properly about gay issues.

On their wedding day, one Catholic couple in attendance commented that Ken and Bruce's service actually deepened the sanctity of their own wedding. Being accustomed to rebutting the notion that gay marriage would weaken heterosexual marriage, Ken recalls: "But I'd never considered that my marriage to Bruce would actually strengthen the institution of marriage."

The above remark notwithstanding, in my view Ken's story concludes on a note of qualified optimism about society's future attitude towards gay individuals. In hindsight, while not free totally from anger, particularly over political injustice, he does acknowledge that his anger is lessening. But he easily recalls:

It occurred to me that my reaction [to Obama's election] wasn't so irrational when seen in the context of growing up gay in the United States....For decades, I'd been told that gay people didn't exist....The Catholic Church told me that my orientation was nothing more than an urge I had to resist for my salvation, as if I were on a diet and homosexuality was ice cream. I was invisible. I had to sit through classes of teachers I knew were homophobic....I entered adulthood full of self-doubt about my very existence.

Ken's reaction was likely provoked by Obama's view, which did not ring true with him, that:

We are big and vast and diverse; a nation of people with different backgrounds and beliefs,

different experiences and stories, but bound by our shared ideal that no matter who you are or what you look like, how you started off, or how and who you love, America is a place where you can write your own destiny.¹⁶

Darling: A Spiritual Autobiography by Richard Rodriguez

During my research for these essays the two comments below, made by Rodriguez, caused me to pause and reflect more than once upon their truth on various levels of experience. Written in 2013, they captured my own understanding of the way things have been and continue to be within my lifetime.

The power the young have over the old is the spirit of the age. In our age, technology is optimism. Technology is a new kind of democracy, supplanting borders. Nothing to memorize, only content.

The power the old exert over the young is the power to send the young to war – flesh in its perfection dropped into a hellish maze of stimulus and response in order to defend an old man’s phrase. A phrase! What? The American way of life?

In the American way of life, Rodriguez has never found an easy rhythm between his religion and his patriotism. Having “faith in America,” or civil religion as he acknowledges it, opportunity comes to those who put aside the disadvantages of family or circumstance and entrust themselves to be encapsulated by the American Dream. For immigrants who came to America the past held no sway, yet these immigrants defined themselves by reference to the old world, Rodriguez maintains.

¹⁶ President Obama, June 26, 2015 (The Office of the Press Secretary).

In my research into gay experience I noted that reference is often made to a “coming out” experience. Reading Rodriguez’s book, however, it occurred to me that for some gays, life has parallels to “the immigrant experience.” To my mind, there may be such an occasion as a “coming in” experience, patterned on the immigrant experience that Rodriguez discusses quite thoroughly in his book. (Rodriguez had two prejudices to overcome in his life: first, as a Mexican-American born in California, and secondly his homosexuality.) “Coming in” may be proffered as an interpretation of the gay experience for some individuals given that they are already living in the “old world” of their youthful gay *isolated* consciousness.

“Coming in” is their movement from that world of isolated gay consciousness into the “new world” of queer adult *public* consciousness, with all the risks such a movement entails. Their reception within the “straight” world may be positive or negative. Painfully, and often fearfully, this new world requires that they redefine themselves according to the standards of a heterosexual experience. Ironically, in doing so for many their “coming in” to the new world may have kept them from “coming out” of their old world.

Finally, a third comment made by Rodriguez has given me pause as a theologian for some deep thinking. It is his question: Is dogma the fossil of the living God – the shell of God’s passing? This question has more than a novel interest for philosophy and theology. On this question hinges our decision, as hetero- or homosexuals, to remain in or leave the church, as I see it. If I accept that “God” is more than is reflected in fossilized dogma, what are the implications for me then as being made in God’s image and likeness and called to live in the Church? Within the context of phenomenological philosophy this question provides an avenue, previously

unavailable, for inquiry into queer studies that may yield alternative answers to the traditional ones.

Rodriguez's book is unlike many other books which discuss queer issues concerning religion and homosexuality. It reads more profoundly and without the personal sense of fear and apprehension as in some other accounts of homosexual experience. In a variation of the theme, inspired by Jesus of Nazareth (Mark 2:27), that *the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath*, Rodriguez has written: "What I will not countenance is that the Church denies me the ability to love. If that is the Church's position, the Church is in error." In other words, the church is made for humanity, not humanity for the church, and Rodriguez remains in the church because the church is more than its own ignorance of sexuality and it continues to offer him more than it denies him. As the Sabbath may become a burden, so may the church, but it is *his* church he maintains.

As we know, the *dogma* of the church is irreformable according to the current teaching of the magisterium. But what of the *interpretation* of the church's dogma? In his book he suggests that the difference between the church's doctrine of the past and the doctrine of the Church to come, will be a difference of *expectation*, not a difference of content. In short, whatever is expected by the faithful for their consolation from the church's teaching may eventually come to pass.

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WHERE TO BEGIN?

I asked myself the question, “Where to begin?” when I realized that there was a need for a new philosophy for queer consciousness to interpret religious experience and I had decided to write a book on the subject. After reviewing various options I finally settled on Reverend Patrick Cheng’s book, *An Introduction to Queer Theology: Radical Love*, written in 2011, as a point of departure. (I remind the reader that my investigative process in all these essays does not follow the traditional logical philosophical path but rather is somewhat eclectic and subjective.)

Cheng’s experience of love, boundaries and dissolution

Cheng begins his book with the words; “When I met and fell in love with my husband, Michael, almost two decades ago, something radical happened. I experienced the boundaries between myself and the outside world dissolving in a way that I had never experienced before.” This is a very significant opening because as an introduction to his theology, and me being the amateur philosopher that I am, the words *love*, *boundaries* and *dissolving* caught my attention. What does he mean by them, I wondered. Cheng speaks as a theologian, but I interpret him philosophically, with an eye to constructive criticism.

Cheng lives within a community of theologians whose religious dialogues take place within the context of Christian *love*. Their love for each other and their love of God motivate their discussions. I, on the other hand, am engaged with a community of philosophers whose discourse predominately takes place within the context of academic *dispute* which perpetually reflects differences of opinion that fuel our discussions. Thus, academic

dispute characterizes our discussions. That is not to say that philosophers are incapable of love, but only that love in the Christian theological sense does not originate our philosophical dialogue. Robert Barron (2015) sees such dispute as occurring among theologians, and suggests that those “who are presently engaged in the rough and tumble of theological debate can draw from [John Henry Newman] not only intellectual inspiration but also strength and a sense of *joie de combat*.¹⁷ It is to be remembered, however, that legitimate philosophical dispute does lead to philosophical consolation when it is resolved, as most philosophers will attest. I, thinking as a philosopher, who has never fallen in love with another person as Chang has, and never been married, undertake my reflections within the notion of philosophical as well as theological dispute. Some background clarification is appropriate.

Internal and external philosophical disputes

Up until somewhat recently, I was conscious of philosophical dispute as only an *external* activity. That is, philosopher vs philosopher. Today, my philosophical dispute is internal, as well as external. That is, I find myself *in opposition* to myself. I am struggling with my inclination to hold on to my philosophical inheritance, even when there is no rational need to do so. Aristotle taught that philosophy begins in wonder. This is true if I remain within the classical Hellenized context of Western philosophy. Not necessarily true, however, if I contemplate my conscious experiences and become aware of the disputes over their interpretation within myself. There is no wonderment generated by my

¹⁷ *Exploring Catholic Theology. Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, p. 107.

internal disputes. What is generated is the desire for peace and harmony within myself by personal contemplation.¹⁸ Yet, my philosophical contemplation does become a “struggle in love” for truth with others and within myself. Such an oppositional approach consisting of internal and external disputes is not totally unknown among philosophers and theologians. As Karl Rahner (1986) has noted: “Philosophy may in fact be somewhat ‘eclectic’ in reflecting the unsystematic pluralism of the history of human experience and thought, and it must be ready to undergo changes in its theological use.”¹⁹

In this regard, a disputed point with Cheng (2011) is that boundaries *are* necessary to constitute the identity of a person. Although, Cheng may have us believe otherwise, at least in his case. For him, “radical love [as at the heart of Christian theology] is also at the heart of queer theory because it challenges our existing boundaries with respect to sexuality and gender identity...as social constructions and *not* essentialist, or fixed, concepts.”²⁰ The separate identity of a homosexual person within the general population came through various “fixed concepts” as introduced into the mind of the public by the acceptance of medical and psychological labels. Such labeling has been popularized by Michel Foucault. According to George Drazenovich

¹⁸ Contemplation is not to be confused with contemporary spirituality. As Brian Gayba (1998:74) writes: “As regards wisdom, the idea that it is the contemplation and savouring of eternal realities will constitute the framework for all subsequent discussions of the gift up to the seventeenth century, when we see a shift of emphasis from classic medieval ideas about contemplation to a broader conception of spirituality.”

¹⁹ *Encyclopedia of Theology. A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 1232, s. v. Philosophy and Theology.

²⁰ *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, p. x, (Cheng’s italics).

(2010) the medicalization and psychologizing of homosexuality is grounded in an ontology, that is, a philosophy of being.²¹ To take a quote for my philosophical purposes from a literary source (*Hamlet*, Act 3, scene 1), one can argue that “To be, or not to be [queer], that is the [philosophical] question.”

Not the *dissolving*, but rather the *establishing* of an understanding of boundaries, or better horizons, defines my identity. Within a social construction boundaries tell me who I am. They are there as horizons of my identity. In my philosophy boundaries are not fixed, but fluid. To be a free human being I must be consciously constructing fluctuating boundaries, rather than merely erasing fixed ones. That is to say that I am continually recognizing that my horizon is changing in a “that was then” vs a “this is now” perspective. If this is what Cheng intends by his remarks, I agree, even though his choice of words seems to indicate otherwise. In my view, I believe that Janice Joplin was mistaken when she sang, “Freedom’s just another word for nothing left to lose....” I *must* have something to lose as my horizon changes, otherwise I am not free to grow nor define myself. I would remain static as the world changes around me. In short, I need to be conscious of a time that that was “me” then, and this is “me” now. Thus, to be truly free I must be consciously “bounded” by my own perpetually expanding horizons.

Phenomenological boundaries (horizons)

Initially my boundaries have been established for me. As I evolve and once I have “come of age,” my boundaries are no longer established for me. Locating my boundaries, or horizons, was a project of personal philosophical effort which amounted to a conscious

²¹ *Foucauldian Analysis of Homosexuality*, p. 11.

discovery of myself. Within this conscious discovery of myself, I continue to rely on experience and reason in recognizing my horizons.

As Cheng acknowledges, humans come to know God through knowing other human beings made in the image and likeness of God. This is the classical philosophical approach. Phenomenology, as one branch of philosophy, investigates phenomena including those *other than God* in order to reach God, without God. This notion of reaching God without God was introduced by Edmund Husserl (1859–1938), as I remember my history of philosophical ideas. Or, in Daniel Guerrière's (1990) words, “Phenomenology does not seek to ‘prove’ that anything ‘exists,’ but inquires into that which presents itself for consciousness to process in the manner that it presents itself.”²² I am aware that a phenomenological approach will most likely make some theologians uncomfortable, particularly evangelical theologians, whose religious perspectives are clearly evident in Cheng's approach to queer issues.

Evangelical theology notwithstanding and according to Gregory Baum through the philosophical efforts at Vatican II a new theological teaching concerning Christian anthropology emerged in the Church. The root of this Christian (phenomenological) anthropology is to be found in the Council's documents. Baum (1968) had written, a few years before I began my undergraduate studies, that

according to Vatican II, ‘The human race has passed from a rather static conception of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.’ What is happening at the moment is that this teaching is being assimilated as self-knowledge. People are beginning to experience themselves in this way.

²² *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion*, p. 5.

Their new self-understanding determines their conscious actions and their reflective knowledge of reality.²³

This new self-understanding as suggested by Baum has influenced a change in my anthropological thinking. Thus, my reflections in these essays are focused in that direction.

Cheng writes of four *sources* of queer theology: scripture, tradition, reason and experience. For the sake of clarity and as a reminder that I am writing as a philosopher and Cheng wrote as a theologian, I present a brief sketch of what I understand *philosophically* by these four theological sources.²⁴

Scripture, tradition, reason and experience

First source: scripture. We all question the faith in which we have been educated and brought up. Many unbelievers, however, consciously and deliberately cultivate atheism as a philosophy of choice for life. For believers, however, God speaks to us in actions and events in an historical context particularly through the scriptures.²⁵ God's word is unlike any human word in that, according to the Bible, God's word brings to pass what it says (Isaiah 55:11).

²³ *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis*, p. 186.

²⁴ The reader should keep in mind that 'theology' is not 'revelation.' The one source of revelation is God; the two modes of revelation are scripture and tradition.

²⁵ This "speaking by God" makes the faithful to be listeners according to Gregory Baum. Listening is always *vis à vis* another person and, as such, listeners must be "ready to listen to the unconditional call that comes to [them] as God's Word." (Baum, 1968:182)

The bible is a unique book in which all there is to say about God and humanity has been said, the faithful believe. In short, there is no new revelation from God (since the death of the last apostle) for orthodox Christians, only alternative interpretations for what has already been given. Further, to equate the interpretation of the bible as God's word with Western civilization alone would be to falsify its meaning and limit its influence. Yet, the bible must be acknowledged as to its historical role as a guide in the ethical behaviour of a large portion of humanity, that is, the Christian faithful. In understanding the bible, the faithful must go beyond a literal sense. We must seek the allegorical meaning and a spiritual meaning for a true interpretation of scripture.

Biblical criticism is a required academic discipline both for the church's self-understanding and its theological interpretation. The comparatively new discipline of biblical criticism respects an individual's faith even though it may scandalize anyone unaware of the evolution of the philosophical and theological principles through which biblical criticism operates. Until the invention of the printing press books were handwritten manuscripts with editions produced by copyists who sometimes made blunders by repeatedly copying errors in transcriptions, albeit unintentionally. It was often impossible to go back to the original text and errors were carried over from one copy to the next. The invention of the printing press gave fresh impulse to the biblical research begun in the Middle Ages. It became necessary to compare the various ancient translations of the bible with the original text and then excise the mistakes from later editions. When taken together, God speaking infallibly in the scriptures and us listening to God faithfully, this arrangement becomes an act of

confidence in God's truthfulness and power.²⁶ Biblical criticism does not aim at casting doubt on the bible's truthfulness. It aims at ridding the false ideas which were thought, or mistakenly believed to be found in the bible. Or in August Sabatier's (1898) words: "Criticism does not formulate new dogmas — that is the business and the right of the Church; but it tries to render easy and free from danger the passage, which is always critical, between old and new ideas."²⁷

Within the formation of their scriptures, the people of Israel had no proper philosophical system, scientific approach, nor artistic heritage by which to frame their experience. Thus, Israel's moral code had essentially developed as a covenant morality via a dialogue structure. That is, it is a call and response pattern that founds the ethics of their scriptures. Today, these same scriptures offer experiences and discoveries, made under God's guiding hand, as it were, to the faithful in their present moment of life. The early fluid interpretation of the people of Israel's experience, through biblical philosophy (phenomenological philosophy), is in contrast

²⁶ Commenting on Michel Foucault's understanding of religious confessors listening to penitents, George Drazenovich writes: "Stepping back historically and analyzing the process of confession reveals that it is a ritual that unfolds within an inverse power relationship. The psychodynamic structure of confession is constituted in such a fashion that paradoxically power is not exercised in the one who speaks but in the one who listens" (Drazenovich, 2010:6). That is to say, over time the penitent listening to the confessor acquires an archive of knowledge, which is power. The theological implication is that listening to God (through the confessor) eventually empowers the listener (the penitent) to make changes and re-create conditions increasingly favourable to personal growth. In this sense, God does not do the work of redemption for us, we work redemption ourselves.

²⁷ *The Vitality of Christian Dogmas and their Power of Evolution: A Study in Religious Philosophy*, p. 82.

to the legally established fixed code of conduct (duty) of later Judaism.

It is worth noting that in the West at least, in the mind of some philosophers *homo biblicus* is being replaced by *homo laicus*. That is, a biblical understanding of humanity is being replaced by a secular understanding of humanity, which characteristically rejects the need for God and claims mastery over its own destiny. Thus, *homo laicus* sees no need for sacred scriptures as revelation, but may accept them as humanistic literature.

For the religious person, that is, a *homo theologicus*, the resurrected Christ is not the mortal Jesus living again in a manner similar to Lazarus who was raised from the dead and subsequently returned to the life of his former existence. In other words, the resurrection of Jesus is not of this concrete world and its experience. The resurrection of Jesus lies elsewhere, in religious transcendence. The resurrection of Jesus is at the centre of transcendent Christianity because it completes the mystery of God, who from the time of Abraham, has been in an alliance with all humanity, as recorded in the sacred scriptures. (Does the reader need to be reminded that not all Christianity is transcendent?)

Second source: tradition. A tradition is a living transmission of cultural values from one generation to the next. Tradition connotes the continual presence of a human spirit and moral attitude. Tradition is that fundamental character of interpretation in a particular community or culture which determines its guiding beliefs. I mean tradition in its Catholic Christian sense of reflecting doctrine and dogma. In short, it is the community's ethos, for better or worse. Today, Christian tradition is often examined through the notion of *ressourcement*. This notion arises out of Vatican II which encouraged a return to the understanding of the origins of one's belief which, when reinterpreted, effects a new

understanding. Stephan Strasser (1963) undertook a similar *ressourcement* with respect to understanding not tradition, but the sciences. He wrote:

Our task will be to outline a philosophical anthropology on a phenomenological basis, showing how man makes a project of objectivity and scientific objectivity. We propose to proceed here in the opposite direction from customary procedure. Instead of ‘explaining’ man by means of the sciences, we hope to make the sciences intelligible by way of man.²⁸

Philosophers and theologians attempt to open the future of belief to the spirit of *ressourcement* as they analyze the traditions they inherited, as Robert Barron (2015) has noted.²⁹ The analysis of openness becomes a question of collective common experience, as opposed to individual private experience. An individual private experience, no matter how often it is felt does not constitute a tradition, but only a repetition. (For better or for worse, it has been my experience that the church’s doctrine and dogma is often repeated, but yet it is not what the contemporary faithful necessarily believe.)

Third source: reason. In Western thinking there is a relationship between philosophy, as a formal discipline

²⁸ *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences: A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal*, p. 62.

²⁹ “The great *ressourcement* theologians of the twentieth century, many of whom were *periti* at the council, tended to engage modernity in an oblique manner. Unlike their liberal colleagues, who endeavored to present Christian theology in a straightforwardly modern form, the *ressourcement* masters — de Lubac, Balthasar, Ratzinger, Daniélou — attempted to assimilate the best of modernity to the patristic form of faith. They took modernity in, but they adapted and corralled it, making it ancillary to classical Christianity.” *Exploring Catholic Theology. Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, p. 126. Where Barron sees this as a positive effort, I see it having negative results.

of human inquiry and Christian revelation available to all humanity. This relationship began in the academy. The early Christian apologists saw no need for a particular philosophy in their interpretation of the Christian life. By the time of St Thomas, however, many religious philosophers and theologians were more interested in distinguishing the supernatural life of faith from the natural (common) life of day-to-day experience. Christian philosophy was coming to birth.

A philosophical notion developing in Western thinking today is that philosophers and theologians are attracted to a methodology which is persuasive (phenomenological) rather than deductive (analytic). Analysis and imagination are less important than experience in this new persuasive method of philosophy. This new persuasive philosophy suggests that some traditional beliefs about Christian philosophy be re-evaluated and possibly changed, such as:

- A Christian philosophy is one which prepares for, or announces Christian values.
- A Christian philosophy is one which has undergone Christian influence and owes its formation to Christianity.
- A philosophy is Christian when it incorporates ideas from Christian revelation.

Under the new persuasive philosophical method these customary perspectives of Christian philosophy may not be as tenable as previously believed. All this may lead in the future to philosophy losing its status as being an apologetic basis for the Christian faith. About such a changed status for Christian philosophy Karl Rahner (1986) has noted: “If such a thing is possible at all, it must remain philosophy in principles and method, and aim at being nothing else.”³⁰

³⁰ *Encyclopedia of Theology. A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*,

The biblical reasons for life differ from the reasons given in the cultures of India, Africa, Oceania and Greece. Biblical philosophy rejects the gods of the pagans and does not integrate easily with the metaphysical, ethical, theological and political ideas characteristic of Hellenist philosophy. The two philosophical approaches cannot be seamlessly blended, yet many contemporary philosophers continue to make attempts at an integration of the two. In his research into human sexuality, John McNeill (1977) intended to bypass such “blending” and achieve a new understanding. He wrote:

I hope in the near future to explore a new ethical understanding of human sexuality as a form of human play — where play is understood as *any* action which has its meaning in itself in the here and now; that is to say, an action that is end-in-itself, just as the person is end-in-himself or herself.³¹

This is the phenomenological approach in which he makes no suggestion at reconciling the two philosophical perspectives of human nature — biblical and scholastic — in his proposed exploration.

During the Middle Ages, while the word “philosopher” referred to the thinkers of pagan antiquity, the word “philosophy” did possess a wider meaning equivalent to wisdom, knowledge, manner of life, and an individual’s world view. In this tradition Christian philosophers continue to appeal to reason even when investigating the wisdom revealed in the scriptures. As history shows the philosophy of the Christian medieval thinkers arose out of an interpretation of revelation as part of their teaching on God, humanity and the world.

p. 1232, s. v. Philosophy and Theology.

³¹ *The Church and the Homosexual*, p. 196, (my italics).

The Medieval philosophers and theologians expressed their way of looking on each of these aspects without clearly distinguishing the methodology supporting their philosophical and theological understandings. Hence, their uncritical acceptance of the idea of reason from Hellenistic thinking. Contemporary philosophers, as a rule, do disclose their supporting methodology.

However, all logical arguments concerning the existence of God are inadequate and cannot make God a certainty in terms of our human experience. Attempts at logical arguments have no chance of convincing anyone of God's existence. Philosophically these attempts, which lack ontological objectivity, fail to awaken in anyone a sense of the creative and life-giving presence of God. However, the mystery of God is another matter. The mystery of God is in the felt phenomenological subjectivity of experience. The ability to be aware of this mystery via phenomenological subjectivity is present with us *ab initio*, that is, at the beginning of our ability to experience. Although, we may not be conscious of this ability until later in life. However, this mystery fails to give certainty for or against God's ontological existence. To their discredit more than one philosopher has failed to understand that reason (human thought) and faith (God's mystery) are not incompatible, as the history of philosophy and theology has shown.

Fourth source: (conscious) experience. There are certain replies to our questions which we believers attribute to God: Who are we? Where do we come from? What are we doing on the earth? Where are we going? Reflection on these questions has opened the way to many currents of philosophical thought ever since the Christian experience came into contact with Hellenist philosophy. Official ecclesiastical intervention, by way of Hellenist philosophy, came into full play over the interpretations of the Trinitarian and Christological

controversies of the Patristic era. In the 20th century Western philosophers began to recognize the existence of atheistic civilizations, not just individual atheists or apostates. For the faithful, the existence of atheism and anti-theism has the potential advantage that it may help purge religion of the magic which is religion's counterfeit. Contemporary non-believers in Christianity are not likely to reject Christianity itself, as some believers have done in the past, but rather, they are likely to reject its traditional Western cultural form since it does not conform to their experience.

Without exclusively endorsing any particular philosophical system for interpretation, my presumption is that it is possible for the human mind to become conscious of the presence of God through experience. It is possible for seekers of an authentic divine presence to recognize what amounts to an invitation from God, at least implicitly, within human experience. However, some individuals recognize the presence of God within myth or in a philosophically unsophisticated manner. That is, through magical or credulous viewpoints. Such under-sophistication presents its own set of problems in the interpretation of experience. Others may engage in poetry as an alternative to philosophy. As Hans Vaihinger remarks in his Autobiographical Introduction to *The Philosophy of "As If,"* a lesson he learned from one of his professors was that "philosophy must give light, but it need not give warmth." ³² The poet, in contrast to the philosopher, may know of such warmth that philosophy lacks. Poems have the capacity to give both light (in the philosophical sense) and human warmth. I suggest that the Poem, *A Father's Faith*, by Joseph Lonergan fulfils this capacity.

³² *The Philosophy of "As If,"* p. xxvii.

A Father's Faith ³³

See the stars within the heavens as you listen to your breathing
And tell me there is nothing to your awe or to your wonder
As the dawn turns into sunrise and the sunrise into morning
Tell me there is nothing beyond what you have seen
Watch the trees go bare to leafy, hear the hosts among them singing
Then tell me there is nothing beyond the sight and sound
See a child embrace its mother or its hand within its father's
And tell me there is nothing to the sigh within you rising
See the pattern of the seasons or the crashing Montmorency
And tell me there is nothing beyond sight or sound and touch
Walk a road or field or forest at the onset of a rainfall
Then catch the scent around you and the memories that arise
Do you think that simple matter can assert that there is nothing
Yet of this some say they're certain, only time and that depleting
As you watch unveiling pattern; surrender all such pride

This is to say that poetry contrasts with the Hellenist philosophical form and one's contemporary conscious world. However, such issues of under-sophistication notwithstanding, it is the business of philosophy, particularly a philosophy of human consciousness, to explore religious experience. Thus, I explore the religious experience through a phenomenological (Continental) philosophy, not an analytic one. The table below illustrate two traditional approaches. The table summarizes research conducted by Domen Bajde and Ahir Gopaldas within Consumer Culture Theory and is to

³³ Montmorency Falls are near Quebec City where Joe Lonergan lives. He is on Facebook.

be published in a forthcoming article, “What Makes a Good Paper? Analytic and Continental Ideals in Consumer Culture Theory.”

Comparison of Analytical and Continental Ideals

Dimension	Analytic tradition	Continental tradition
Core ideals	Emphasis on abstraction, agnosticism, clarity, coherence, consistency, generalizability, parsimony, precision, reason, rigor, science, and systematicity	Emphasis on creativity, critique, depth, experience, history, holism, imagination, metaphor, originality, phenomenology, politics, and transcendence
Writing styles	Convergent, disciplined, and sometimes dry writing styles, inspired by logic and the sciences	Divergent, playful, and sometimes convoluted writing styles, inspired by the arts and humanities
Theoretical aims	Analysis; developing precise definitions of key concepts and linking these concepts in logical propositions based on coherent arguments	Synthesis; developing critical, holistic, and imaginative analyses of contemporary social issues and linking them to interrelated issues
Logics of progress	Each empirical study makes a novel but additive contribution to a widely established theoretical puzzle embedded in a communally shared research paradigm	Each grand theorist aspires to articulate a radically original interpretation of the world, with few presuppositions, sometimes invoking the ideas of other grand theorists
Use of contexts	Using real-world sites as contexts for the development and clarification of generalizable theories	Examining real-world sites for their inherent significance and engaging with the politics of those contexts

Critiques	Continental thinkers view Analytic scholarship as formulaic, lifeless, mechanistic, overgeneralized, rigid, soulless, stifling, and uncritical	Analytic thinkers view Continental scholarship as convoluted, descriptive, esoteric, fanciful, sloppy, speculative, unscientific, and unsystematic
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In consideration for the reader's convictions, I must introduce at this point a word on my understanding of human consciousness and its role or function within philosophy. Consciousness is not a philosophy in itself but is a *quality of the human mind* the mind it undertakes any intellectual activity. My conscious activity is a self-disposition through which I may render my experience meaningful and worthwhile to myself as well as for others. Therefore, I am not surprised when my faith, as it evolves and develops, questions the different interpretations of the doctrines and dogmas reflecting the meaning of life. Of course, my problem is not with the content of the doctrines and dogmas of the faith as I have inherited them. The problem is my conscious *interpretation* of their content in light of my contemporary experience, what to make of them in other words. That being the case, I can only believe in the kind of God who is consistent with my moral experience. In any case, the eternal presence of God remains in place despite any contrary experience I may have of God's absence. Thus, my challenge becomes: how to take advantage of an evolutionary understanding of my experience to improve upon and update my understanding of God, rather than defend a traditional concept of God.

Phenomenological philosophy can offer a new interpretation of queer consciousness which has appeared only slowly in the evolution of human consciousness.

Queer consciousness is not found only in individuals. Individuals possess their queer consciousness within a collective societal consciousness common to all humans. (I prescind from any discussion on pathological consciousness, collectively or individually, and presume in my thinking that the individual is free from any “clinical” handicap.) Collectively, as a whole, human consciousness discloses that we, in fact, are responsible for the conditions of life we create. Explaining these conditions of life is the role of the “soft sciences” within Western culture. On the other hand, interpretation, not explanation, is the role of philosophy in Western culture. From a theological perspective there may be no recognition of a “divine plan” for all humanity. However, there is the opportunity for a consciously co-created social agenda, for better or for worse, open to all humans. Within this perspective, I realize often that I *currently* lack a future agenda, which I *now* want to create. Or, that my present plan needs revision in light of future objectives. Animals cannot establish their futures in this sense. Queer consciousness challenges the modern individual not to accept the existing situation but to envision and create a new agenda for the future.

Let me be clear at this point that I am not seeking to develop a philosophy that accounts for a universal understanding of queer consciousness. But, to develop a workable philosophy for the person who desires to act morally and religiously in particular situations of queer experience. That is, I am attempting to construct a philosophical tool for queer use. In other words, create an integral methodology for queer individuals to live a self-directed moral life, not a life determined by a necessary *a priori* standard. This suggested moral philosophy is based on my experience and in light of an historical and evolutionary understanding of consciousness that was unavailable to classical philosophers. My efforts at such a

moral philosophy are similar, but less erudite than those of Leslie Dewart (1989) who wrote:

Very few of the observations and concepts I have used in this investigation are original; indeed, most are not even new. What I have tried to accomplish here — the sort of task that philosophy had always deemed among its chief responsibilities, though in the anglophone world as I gather no longer — is mainly to arrange a large number of tesserae that, if taken one by one, are very familiar, into the single mosaic of a fairly comprehensive and unconventional philosophical synthesis.³⁴

The “single mosaic of a fairly comprehensive and unconventional philosophical synthesis” that Dewart seeks is not based on classical philosophy. Dewart’s single mosaic is, rather, a phenomenological matrix of individual attitudes, values and goals plus their subsequent effects on the structure of any organization or social group — queer or otherwise.

My project is not as comprehensive as Leslie Dewart’s but only aims at providing an acceptable philosophical point of view (which is provisional at this point) that adequately supports the queer perspective of experience in our contemporary world. Some readers may find my philosophical ideas unconventional. That is most likely because I have borrowed from other philosophers and theologians and subsequently turned their ideas to my purposes — hence I have undertaken an eclectic philosophy, which is itself somewhat unconventional. I am not the only theologian to undertake such a personal project, however.³⁵

³⁴ *Evolution and Consciousness. The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*, p. xi.

³⁵ Robert Barron writes that he has undertaken his own philosophical project and that, “we have to get much better at giving a reason for

My phenomenological approach, in interpreting queer consciousness, means that I must include myself as participating in the interpretation of what I observe and experience. As well, a crucial point that needs to be re-addressed, from my point of view, is that human experience is intelligible only in relation to animal experience. Human experience is often understood as an ex-animal experience, not an ex-angelic, or ex-divine experience. From a traditional philosophical point of view humans did not *evolve out* of God, but are *made* in God's image and likeness, at least in Christian understanding. However, a reverse point of view may be permissible as well. That is, human nature is somehow "ex-divine" and must be seen in relation to its divine origin. The notion of co-creator is derived from this reverse supposition. In these essays I suggest that the interpretation of human experience has evolved intelligibly *in relation to the presence God*, and not solely as compared to animal experience. Hence, sin remains an element for theological consideration in queer consciousness.

On thinking in print

In these essays, I write in the first person singular, whenever possible, taking into account my experience as if I were thinking out loud, but in print. I do this as an "ally" of LGBT issues as in Cheng's understanding.³⁶

the hope that is in us, we have to get much more adept at articulating our belief in the simple God whose otherness enhances rather than competes with the world. We have to formulate a new fundamental apologetics" (Barron, 2015:28). However, in my view, he lacks the contemporary philosophical tools to accomplish his goals. His theology is constructed on the unacknowledged principles of a Hellenist philosophy.

³⁶ The acronym LGBT, as I intend its use, includes all current and future variants.

Cheng (2011) writes: “The term ‘queer’ also can include ‘allies’ who may not themselves identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex or questioning, but stand in solidarity with their queer sisters and brothers in terms of seeking a more just world with respect to sexuality and gender identity.”³⁷ I am of the opinion that knowledge of ourselves and of the world is destined to advance indefinitely through philosophical effort. I offer Carlo Rovelli’s (2014) book as an example of what I mean. He concludes his exploration with the words, “It’s a vast world, with much to clarify and explore...Beyond the next hill there are worlds still more vast, still to be discovered.”³⁸ In the Western tradition, philosophy’s recent past has been less than remarkable due to the interpretive inadequacies that have caused it to stagnate in the current context. Philosophy has, to my mind, not yet overcome the inadequacies that caused its role to be taken over by the “soft” and “hard” sciences for all intents and purposes.³⁹

Despite the current lack of interest in philosophy, I hope to engage in a new philosophical perspective within the developing context of Queer Studies. I have chosen the context of Queer Studies because it is an emerging area of moral and cultural thought that needs philosophical attention to be humanly, as well as humanely, appreciated. Plus, the newness and freshness of queer consciousness provides an excellent context and opportunity for philosophical renewal. Although I am a theologian by education, I do not make my philosophy dependent upon theology, or religious faith, as has been

³⁷ *Radical Love: An Introduction to Queer Theology*, p. 3.

³⁸ *Reality is Not What It Seems: The Journey to Quantum Gravity*, p. 235.

³⁹ This ‘take over’ thesis is articulated by Leslie Dewart throughout his posthumously published, *Hume’s Challenge and the Renewal of Modern Philosophy*.

done in the past by many religious philosophers. Rather, my approach is that of a somewhat independent thinker whose thought is eclectic, drawing upon various notions within the perspective of “philosophical dehellenization” as initially promoted by Leslie Dewart.⁴⁰

Philosophers of queer consciousness are at the point of determining their own path by judiciously accepting elements from theology and integrating them within queer experience. To date, queer consciousness has succeeded in attracting the theological attention of the church’s Pastoral Care Ministers to some degree. The more difficult task will be attracting the attention of the Church’s theologians to the sensitive problems arising over the doctrinal and dogmatic interpretation arising in queer consciousness.

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⁴⁰ I have written about Dewart’s philosophical dehellenization elsewhere in *Dehellenization and Dr. Dewart Revisited*.

NOW, IS THERE SIN IN QUEER CONSCIOUSNESS?

As a phenomenologist, I hold that philosophy can only analyze values that are present to consciousness. In presenting these essays I discuss values of which I have become conscious at some point in my life. I am aware that others, with similar experiences, may realize different values than I do even though our experiences may be very similar. My choice of values is eclectic in that I select examples from within the experience of my intellectual, social, historical and religious life.

To be humanly conscious of something is to have made a deliberate decision of some sort about it. Even if the decision is to ignore that decision. Recognizing that “conscience” and “consciousness” are related terms, I deliberately focus on values which supply the content for my conscience.⁴¹ “Conscience is not correctly explained by the assumption of innate moral ideas,” as Rudolf Hofmann (1986) has remarked. But “its aim is the fullest possible exercise of conscientious decision, and therefore the opportunity of adopting a personal point of view must not be taken away.”⁴² The philosophical significance of the moral value of one’s own decision is crucial to appreciating the arguments I set forth in this collection of essays. In applying my understanding to a queer context, I draw heavily on Leslie Dewart’s philosophical investigations into consciousness and conscience. Dewart held that one’s understanding of morality arises from within a conscious experience of values and is not imposed externally by any agency or authority.

⁴¹ Dewart discusses the etymological relationship of conscience and consciousness on pages 49 and 50 in *Evolution and Consciousness*.

⁴² *Encyclopedia of Theology. A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 284, s. v. Conscience.

The moral value of one's decision must alter one's evaluation of sin, which I suggest is necessary if the conclusion to Alfonso Gómes-Rossi's research is to be realized. In undertaking Queer Studies Gómes-Rossi (2010) concluded that "the best way to get the Church to accept gays and lesbians is using the argument that in essence gays and lesbians are born with those preferences." And, being born with such preferences those "gays and lesbians that want to be accepted by the Catholic Church have attempted to find the answers that justify their homosexuality, with the hope of *undermining the premise* that they are acting sinfully" [my italics].⁴³

At present, my perspective is that in order to maintain the hope of "undermining the premise that they are acting sinfully" queer individuals will need to embrace a phenomenological philosophy in place of classical scholasticism. In so doing they may realize ultimately their particular goal of revising present theological thinking concerning the justification of their homosexual activity, i.e., that it is not sinful. Humans cause things to happen consciously or unconsciously. Humans *act* consciously with a goal in mind when they deliberately set in advance what they intend to attain as a practical or moral advantage. Infra-humans, that is, non-human animals also act but their goal is set for them by external circumstances which they cannot practically or morally alter. (In practice, robins do not build eagles' nests. The Inuit can, however, construct igloos or tents.)

⁴³ Master of Science Degree, Universidad de las Américas, Puebla. "A Longing to Belong: Homosexuals who refuse to leave Catholicism," Chapter Three in *Repair my Church: Discrimination, State Intervention and the Acceptance of North American Gays and Lesbians into the Catholic Church*. [accessed via academia.edu]

This is another way of saying that animals are exempt morally from deliberation and accountability, but humans are held to be deliberately accountable.

Western philosophy generally accepts that the traditional purpose of sexual activity is to produce new life in the form of future generations. According to traditional theologians and religious philosophers, sexual activity without this goal is a “death threat,” as it were, frustrating God’s purpose, and hence is sinful. Gay sexual activity cannot, of its nature, produce new life. As I see it, sexual sins (or frustrating God’s purpose) are the same for the homosexual and heterosexual. By way of example, anal sex (heterosexual or homosexual) like contraception, does not lead to new life. Yet, many liberated heterosexuals absolve themselves of guilt in this respect when considering the act consensual between the partners and thus morally acceptable. To the contrary, from those same heterosexuals, I have heard the argument that homosexual anal sex is inherently unnatural and without any justifiable qualification. Clearly there is confusion in current moral thinking, or at least a double standard, among sexual partners concerning non-lifegiving sexual activity.

A sense of sin as “missing the mark” is revealed within the biblical perspective. Phenomenologically, moral knowledge as virtue, that is, “non-sin” is the *adjusting* from within the world of mere experience to a world of personal value. This adjustment is not imposed from outside the world of experience by any agency. Rather, it is necessitated internally within the agent him or herself. Often in adjusting to the world as it actually is, we humans “miss the mark” in making a moral decision. As humans we must adjust ourselves as agents within the world of which we are consciously aware and are a part. Morality, or moral knowledge, consists in assigning a *human value* to our actions. Scientists or technicians do

not assign or determine human values; philosophers determine and assign human values. In this sense, everyone is a philosopher. And therefore, there is a need for a new philosophy underpinning science and technology, plus all the social sciences which influence the course of events in our contemporary world.

Just as science and technology promote goals for physical health; consciousness promotes values for moral (mental) health, that is, by distinguishing between what is sinful and what is not. We deem ourselves worthy or unworthy, in our own eyes, as we form our conscience. To act morally is a human skill exhibited to varying degrees by individuals, queer or straight. Hence, morality is not a static standard of the quality of human life determined by commandment or law. Rather, morality is a movement to what is “good” in human life (although not necessarily in the classical sense). Human consciousness discloses that there is an existential call (by way of evolution) to move from a morality of obedience (duty) to a morality of responsibility (initiative). In a morality of responsibility according to Dewart (1989), “transcendence” understood as characterizing an agent, i.e., God, is optional. He writes:

But the fact that human life and behaviour do not have a transcendent value or fulfil a transcendent purpose hardly means that human beings can *achieve* nothing, or that our efforts cannot be evaluated as *progressive* or *regressive* in relation to the possibilities that are open to us as a result of our having evolved into experiencers who are conscious [Dewart’s italics].⁴⁴

⁴⁴ *Evolution and Consciousness. The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*, p. 283.

If I have understood Dewart's mind correctly, queer or straight, a morality of responsibility attaches to human consciousness.

From a moral perspective in the context of a queer consciousness there is need for a new philosophy of interpretation in the manner of, but not identical with, straight philosophy. The subsequent task for a queer theology then is to point to the malaise in the spiritual life that the queer individual suffers arising from some principles of straight theology. To the question: What is the task of the Catholic intellectual? Barron (2015) replies, "It is to evangelize the mind, to speak of God's noncompetitive transcendence, of the nonviolence of creation, of the God-given intelligibility of the real, of sin, death and the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It is, in a word, to declare the truth in love."⁴⁵ For the believer, queer theology must offer words of hope showing that the malaise arising from a straight theology is an evil, and that freedom from this evil is attainable. Such theology would then overcome the limited understanding of straight theology which lacks queer acceptance. Or, expressed in another way, in light of this essay's title, straight theology lacks acceptance of the queer sinner on a par with the straight sinner. To accept traditional theology as a fixed charter of doctrinal conservatism fearful of any change, would be a misreading of the nature of philosophy and theology, rendering a deficient understanding of sin.

⁴⁵ *Exploring Catholic Theology. Essays on God, Liturgy, and Evangelization*, p. 77. With respect to queer issues, however, I suggest that in his book Barron has failed to demonstrate this goal as applied to queer theology and it remains as a text in straight theology.

THE SEPARATION OF PHILOSOPHY AND SCIENCE

In our present intellectual climate many of the new age perspectives undertaken in seeking clarification and knowledge of ourselves are likely to be short-lived in terms of the longevity of ideas. In other words they are “trendy” for a while. A case in point, to my mind, is the current *hybrid understanding* of our human consciousness, which integrates elements of scientific and philosophical understanding. Such integration of scientific and philosophical thinking may be more of a hindrance than a help. Whether every action in which I am engaged at any given moment is susceptible to philosophical interpretation is a *debatable* question. Whereas, every action I undertake at any given moment is unquestionably susceptible to scientific explanation. However, the moment I begin theorizing consciously about my action it becomes a philosophical question of interpretation, and no longer merely one of scientific explanation. To my mind, the two operations are distinct as to their purposes and ought not be conflated. Science and philosophy must remain distinct approaches to knowledge, although related.

Knowing myself better is a prime purpose of my philosophy. Generally, philosophers seek in the notion of God (or in some sort of absolute principle) the reconciliation of a conflict which is felt within themselves as well as among themselves and within their world. In short, they tend to seek unity as a goal of their experience. This, I suggest, is a misdirection due to the Hellenist understanding of knowledge carried over into modern philosophy. My experience indicates clearly that evolution tends to diversity, not to uniformity; to plurality, not to unity. In short, my experience does not

conform to the Hellenist philosophical understanding that humanity is heading *towards* unity, but *away* from it.

I am, as a thinking organism, capable of distinguishing between myself as subject and myself as object. This distinction is achieved through a process of differentiation which occurs within my consciousness. However, this process of differentiation does not divide my integrity as a person. Following Auguste Sabatier's suggestion, I envision my consciousness similar to an ellipse, as it were, possessing *two centres of activity*. One centre is receptive of information through sensation and is *passive*. The other centre is creative of meaning and is *active*. Sabatier (1897) writes: "The line of the ellipse described by the relation and the distance of these two centres is the approximate but never perfect synthesis of the two *kinds* of data which thus arrive in consciousness" (my italics). ⁴⁶ Were the two centres ever to merge perfectly a circle would result, symbolic of perfect unity. But, if my personal experience is any guide this can never happen. Hence, I redirect my efforts to understand philosophically that diversity, not unity, is the projected status of my experience. On the other hand, my theology (faith seeking understanding) has been directed towards outcomes that are somehow unified with respect to their relationships. To date, I have found that Daniel Guerrière's (1990) understanding of theology most satisfactory. "Theology remains the self-knowledge of faith for the sake of faith. It compromises a systematic (or dogmatic) and a practical (or pastoral) endeavor, each with a methodological (or dialectical) moment." ⁴⁷

⁴⁶ *Outlines of a Philosophy of Religion*, p. 303.

⁴⁷ *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion*, p. 10.

Relationships, not connections

My mind is an activity of my brain. It is an abstracted activity understood as distinct, but related to my body. Thus, my conscious mind, or my conscious mental activity, is literally a metaphysical activity. In an opposing view, reductionists hold that the mind is the brain, or, more accurately that conscious mental activity is identical with physical neural activity. This identification with physical neural activity is a “red herring” which is part of the artificial philosophical problem that is caused by integrating science into the philosophical understanding of the mind. There is no need to merge science with philosophy in order to understand the mind. Historically, each has had a role to play and continues to have a role to play independently within human consciousness. Philosophically, I understand a dualistic approach in this matter (a duality) and believe that conscious mental activity, or mind, is constitutionally different from anything in the physical world. Mind and matter are of two distinct *orders*.

It is possible that the metaphysical activity of my mind coincides with the physical life of my brain as a living organism. However, it is not necessarily so. The two are not connected in any manner of identification, but are only reciprocally related. The conclusion I ultimately draw, then, is that my consciousness (a metaphysical activity of my mind) cannot be identical with anything physical, because there is no causal *connection* between the mental and the physical. Only a *relationship* exists between the physical and the mental, which is not necessarily a causal connection, although it may be so in certain cases.⁴⁸ On the macroscopic level

⁴⁸ An example could be that an organism becomes necessarily constituted or composed as human at a certain point of proximity in the distance (space) given in the relationship between the mental

my consciousness is a movement on my part as an observer which brings about no change, of itself, in that which I observe. Thus, the current the presumption of a connection between science and philosophy is unnecessary chaff and, in fact, a mistaken understanding of their relationship. To my mind, attention would be better focused on the relationship of the two as independent, but related, disciplines.

A suggestion put forth in the *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is that some form of materialism is probably much more widely held today than in centuries past. No doubt part of the reason for this has to do with the increase in scientific knowledge concerning the working of the brain and its misunderstood relationship to the conscious mind. (This includes any relationship between a physically damaged brain and various degrees of unconscious activity.)

The *Encyclopedia* also notes that it is difficult to see any real connection between specific conscious states and brain states in a way that *explains* just how or why conscious states are identical with brain states. That is to say that some philosophers conclude that an explanatory gap exists between the physical and mental which someday may be overcome. To my mind, there is not a true “gap” between the two as if one did not influence the other. But this “gap” is constituted by the misconceived relationship between the mental and the physical. Again, from my perspective, this gap is artificially produced by well-intentioned, but misguided, academics who try to establish the existence of connections in order to close any gap where they should understand relationships. When such academics are theologians, I find it

state of the organism and its physical matter. Should the mental state and its matter separate and become too far apart in distance (space), the human organism would cease to exist, that is, de-compose.

disconcerting that their theology seems to be “immature.” Brian Gaybba (1998) understands that:

The degree of academic maturity of *any* theology can be measured by the extent to which it is *conscious of* and examines its own presuppositions and methodology. It is therefore a sign of the maturity of monastic theology that several of its practitioners pondered the *epistemological presuppositions* of a theology that places experiencing the divine at the very heart of its methodology (my italics).⁴⁹

Some of the questions that gave rise to the essays in the book have been discussed in the *Internet Encyclopedia*. As well, some questions in this collection of essays recall Auguste Sabatier’s perspective to these same issues. Could there be two centers (poles) to conscious activity (subjective/objective) in one mind? What makes a person the same person (a *continuum*) over time? What makes a person, a *person* (an identity) at any given moment? These questions are closely related to the traditional philosophical problem of personal individuality, which is also linked to self-consciousness, not just consciousness. It is significant that only persons can be self-conscious. To my mind, for a satisfactory resolution to these questions, a philosophical methodology that remains distinct from, and not merged with a scientific methodology is required. In short, an independent anthropological philosophy of consciousness that keeps philosophy and science separate is needed.

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⁴⁹ *God’s Wisdom and Human Reason*, p. 10.

CONSCIOUSNESS: A METAPHYSICAL UNDERSTANDING

A metaphysics

My personal philosophy consists, in fact, of a metaphysics constructed within phenomenological philosophy. I accept that metaphysics is a subjective understanding of the “effect in us of something more than us — of more than any purely human facts and desires.” This metaphysical description, as Roger Aubert (1986) notes, has been attributed to Baron Friedrich von Hügel (1852-1925).⁵⁰ George Drazenovich (2011), a mental health educator, observes that poststructural analysis is one of the main philosophical foundations supporting queer theory today....For poststructuralists, there is no *a priori*, essential foundational structure of identity that is encoded in human history and consciousness.⁵¹ Poststructuralists are metaphysical philosophers, not materialistic philosophers or physical scientists.

I favour the position that our times require of me and others desiring to make sense of experience a metaphysical philosophy of consciousness, not a materialistic one. Although, my personal philosophy of consciousness is not tied to any particular school of thought it has its genesis in the perspectives of the German philosophers since the time of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Insightfully, Kant (1959) has written: “But the service which [metaphysics] renders to theology in making it independent of the judgement of dogmatic speculation, and thus completely securing it against all attacks of such opponents, is certainly not to be

⁵⁰ *Encyclopedia of Catholic Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 974, s. v. Modernism.

⁵¹ *Queering Sex Education*, n. p.

underestimated.”⁵² Werner Brock (1901-1974) has noted in his *Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy*, that technology, economics, and politics are approaches to life that seek to improve the lot of humanity without the aid of Christian dogma. While technology, economics and politics, Brock (1935) writes,

will continue as part of the life of Western man, the fate of Christianity is yet uncertain. No doubt, today as centuries ago, the Church provides many men with an interpretation of existence and thereby with spiritual strength for life, an apparently indispensable support for the masses, whose actual life is ruthlessly formed as well as left without purpose or inspiration by technique, economic life and the State. On the other hand all these forces as well as the sciences act independently of and often in opposition to Christianity inasmuch as they seek to bind man to their particular aims and to develop ways of thinking suitable to these mundane purposes. Likewise philosophy, by its unlimited search for truth and its will to freedom, *stands opposed at least to Christian dogma and to the principle of the authority of divine revelation*, inherent in it (my italics).⁵³

If I understand him correctly, Brock means that philosophy which is really *metaphysical Hellenism*, that has fossilized Christian dogma in its current form. If I am correct, a contemporary philosophical critique of metaphysical Hellenism can be beneficial for believers in revising the understanding of Christian dogma and doctrine. Such a philosophical critique was attempted by the early so-called Modernist theologians who, in Roger Aubert's (1986) words “tried to replace scholastic

⁵² *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present Itself as a Science*, p. 154.

⁵³ *Introduction to Contemporary German Philosophy*, p. 119.

intellectualism by a doctrine which would involve the forces of the heart and the concreteness of actual life.”⁵⁴ Obviously, as history shows they met with limited success.

The process of constructing metaphysics begins in the subjective interpretation of experience. But the construction of metaphysical notions (not ideas) in phenomenology is not built on any theory of idealistic being. Rather, it arises out of consciousness as an activity of my mind. In traditional Western understanding to know a thing more thoroughly often means to possess more information about the same thing. This is not the case, however, in phenomenological philosophy. In phenomenological philosophy self-understanding is clarified qualitatively, not quantitatively.

There are profound theological implications to clarifying my consciousness of God. Within my consciousness of God (a noetic, not idealistic understanding) I distinguish between *conformity* and *fidelity* to the presence of God in my life. Philosophically, conformity originates with my relation to another being, including the presence of God, which I owe to it by reason of the nature of its being. That is, I do its will, conform to its presence. Fidelity, on the other hand, originates with my relation to the other, including the presence of God, which I owe to myself by reason of my nature. That is, I am faithful to my will for the sake of the other without identifying with the other. Conformity obligates me from outside of myself. Fidelity obligates me from within myself. Phenomenologically, conformity and fidelity are literally poles apart in the experience of my world.

⁵⁴ *Encyclopedia of Catholic Theology: A Concise Sacramentum Mundi*, p. 970, s. v. Modernism.

Human consciousness, as I have mentioned elsewhere, is the ability to conceptualize my experience to others, as well as to conceptualize my experience to myself. Thus, being conscious renders me capable of conceptualizing my experience of the presence of God to others and to myself. The conceptualization of the presence of God is a theological activity that I undertake within the cultural forms of my ex-animal, as well as, my ex-divine life, as I have mentioned earlier. Philosophically, my thought reflects the mind of the Psalmist who asked: What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels, you have crowned him with glory and honour, putting everything in subjection under his feet. (Psalm 8:4)

The presence of God

My experience tends to confirm that the presence of God is revealed to me as initiated on God's part not out of necessity, but out of love.⁵⁵ Phenomenologically, I experience God as that affected presence which makes itself felt and makes me to be more than I would be, were I not exposed to it. It is in this sense that I am defined as a self and that my boundaries (horizons) are defined within the presence of God. To express this definition religiously, I adopt a phenomenological philosophical interpretation that accurately and truthfully reflects my experience. In short, I dehellenize the interpretation of my horizons within God. This, in turn, gives me a foundation for an appropriate theology concerning my experience of the presence of God. What needs to be

⁵⁵ Such love is not romantic, nor does it eliminate dispute. Recall the biblical story in which Jacob "disputes" with God, the outcome of which is a "loving" relationship between God and humanity throughout history (Genesis 32:24-30).

proven to me is not that God *exists*. Rather, what requires to be shown, since it is not immediately obvious, is that I am in the *presence* of God. As a philosopher and theologian I must first determine philosophically, and then express theologically, in what sense the presence of God is present to me. Or, alternatively, in what sense I am within the presence of God.⁵⁶

My personality reflects the conscious awareness of myself. Within certain stages in my evolution I desire to evolve as a person beyond my present less-than-perfect self. I desire to “clean up my act,” as it were. When I look at my present world and interpret my nature through my inherited religious traditions, I find I am looking only at the past and not to a possible and undetermined future. I must look beyond my present situation, otherwise, in looking to the past I allow the power of God to be exercised *over* me. That being the case, I remain a creature with no possible opportunity to evolve to a co-creator status.

However, if I interpret the present moment phenomenologically the God in whose presence I exist

⁵⁶ I am beyond that stage of philosophizing in which some religious philosophers and theologians still make the effort at preserving the integration of philosophy and science to prove God’s existence through some form of intelligent design, i.e., the fine-tuning argument. “The fine-tuning argument purports to provide evidence—substantial evidence, even—for the *existence* of God. We think that the fine-tuning argument does exactly what it purports to do. This is not to say we think that the fine-tuning argument establishes the existence of God, makes atheism irrational, or anything like that. The epistemic status of theism depends not only on the status of the fine-tuning argument, but also on the status of just about every other argument in the philosophy of religion” (my italics). From an unpublished paper, “Misapprehensions about the Fine-Tuning Argument” by John Hawthorne and Yoav Isaacs, (accessed via academia.edu, 10 July, 2017).

does not have absolute power over me in the traditional sense. Rather, God's power is *shared* with me as a co-creator as we encounter each other. That is to say that I can choose to create my own life independently and legitimately of any pre-ordained purposes of God. This has not always been understood in Western philosophy. I can rearrange my interpretation of the world created by God in ways which can serve God and at the same time establish my autonomy within that creation. The fundamental relation between God and me, then, consists not in a hierarchical relationship of power, but in a relationship of the mutual presence in love. In this way, I have philosophically recast my faith and the meaning of religion in terms that do not imply God's absolute power over me, nor my inordinate submission to the will of God. In short, my faith is based on fidelity, not conformity. (I am of the opinion that such conformity reflects a legacy of understanding inherited from the Old Testament tradition of God's presence among the faithful. And, subsequently it has been incorporated, to varying degrees, within the New Testament understanding.)

My experience may be interpreted as negative or positive which subsequently affects my philosophical understanding. Reflecting upon my experience negatively, I may conclude that Western civilization is dying. Things are not the way they once were. Life is decadent. The Christian moral values that I once acknowledged publicly are challenged and often appear to be nothing more than conflicting opinions. The moral principles that formerly held my life together seem to be disintegrating as the traditional supports of my religious life are undermined. Reflecting on my experience positively, however, the world goes on and I, like many ordinary persons, am a cheerful and optimistic individual despite the world's negativity. Through an innate

disposition and deliberate attitude, I believe that life is good and I feel a part of a larger rhythm of creation regardless of any experience to the contrary. In short, the positive overcomes the negative.

Often, such an optimistic disposition and attitude are expressed within a religious perspective, or through a secular, but respectful attitude toward life and creation in general. Devout people, regardless of their social status, often experience religion as one social construction among others, similar to the various philosophical, political and economic movements within a culture. All such movements are a means whereby we are able to relate to each other, negatively or positively. The decay or the growth of any one of these movements will have a corresponding effect on the participants in that movement. It is clear that a positive consciousness and its subsequent theological development cannot take place in any defensive and self-isolating context of decay. Rather, a positive consciousness needs the constructive and supportive context of human love.

A re-structured consciousness: “The Third Man”

I conclude this reflection on metaphysical understanding of consciousness through a reconsideration of a phenomenon that was current at the time of the Vatican Council II, but no longer seems in vogue. While the term, “The Third Man,” may no longer be used, I believe its content is currently lived out on a day-to-day basis by many Catholics, queer or straight. I trust Gregory Baum’s understanding of the overall concept, as he discussed it in *The Credibility of the Church Today*, is correct and I present a synopsis of it here.

The term “The Third Man” originates with François Roustang, I understand, who wrote an article on the notion in the Jesuit publication *Christus* in 1966. (I presume the reader to understand that the term is representative of many faithful individuals). According to Baum, “The Third Man” describes a new kind of individual in the church. The first kind is that progressive Catholic who desires a renewal of Church life according to Vatican II. The second kind is that individual who prefers the pre-conciliar church with its conservative approach to life. “The Third Man” denotes that kind of individual who regards the Church as a spiritual home and is attached to Catholic tradition. But, when the Church’s teaching does not make sense in light of experience, it is ignored by “The Third Man.” There is no argument with the Church and if its teaching makes sense to other Catholics, let them accept it. The same holds true for the sacramental life of “The Third Man” when the sacraments have become barriers to community life. A choice is made, not to discount the sacraments, but not to participate in them, and not to have a guilty conscience. The same applies to church law, knowing that human life is complex and there are situations in which church law does not necessarily promote the spiritual well-being of the person, the law is ignored without a guilty conscience. In good conscience, then, “The Third Man” moves to the margins of the ecclesiastical institution. Up until recently, I suggest, this has been the experience of many queer Catholics. I accept that their conscience may be clear, but their sense of loss must be profound.

By 1981, fifteen years after Roustag’s article, John de Satgé (1981) was able to speak of the “Fourth Man,” with due acknowledgement to Peter Hebblethwaite.

This Fourth Man remains within the Church, for he sees it as ‘humanity in so far as it has recognized, however falteringly, its vocation in

Christ.’ Such people ‘can no more leave the Church than they can take leave of humanity. To do so would be a form of spiritual suicide.’ Yet the Fourth Man never feels at home in the Church and he remains its continual critic.⁵⁷

This, I suggest, continues to be the experience of many queer Catholics today.

There is no loss of faith in the life of the “Third and Fourth Man.” Their attitude is a reaction to an almost insurmountable difficulty in accepting the redemptive mystery of Christ in their day-to-day lives. Nor is there any confusion over belief in their convictions. They know what they believe and they remain convinced in their faith. And yet, as Baum (1986) notes the process of consciously seeking out appropriately the redemptive mystery on a daily basis is perpetually required of them as faithful Catholics, queer or straight.

While we pass through this process we are all more or less third men. As Catholics we accept the Church’s teaching, but as we adjust to the new focus of the Gospel, there are many doctrinal positions to which we are, at this time, unable to assign a clear meaning. In some important cases, what may be required is *the endorsement of the re-interpretation by the ecclesiastical magisterium* (my italics).⁵⁸

In light of faith and queer consciousness, within this brief passage, Gregory Baum, a sociologist, has provided an insight well ahead of his time, it seems to me.

Traditional Western philosophy arose in response to different problems within a different cultural context. These problems reflected differing aspects of the human condition. In contrast, a phenomenological philosophy of

⁵⁷ *Peter and the Single Church*, p. 148.

⁵⁸ *The Credibility of the Church Today. A Reply to Charles Davis*, p. 202.

consciousness discloses a new human condition, or better, a new heightening of consciousness. And in evolving from my present level of consciousness, into a higher and deeper level of consciousness, I am able to re-structure the order and the harmony of my being more closely to the image and likeness of God.

§

CONSCIOUSNESS AND FAITH

Self-awareness

An “after the event” awareness of my experience is characteristic of my human nature. I may not be aware at the time of an event, but I can certainly become so after an event. Further, my capacity for self-consciousness makes me a human being. I know that I am conscious of myself as being a religious person. In my consciousness both my religious awareness and secular awareness follow the same philosophical methodology on interpretation.

I do not know, that is, I am not conscious of the initial dynamic act of my being brought into this life. But, once born, I begin to become conscious of my being and realize that I am not self-created. However, I become conscious, not of an “object” I am creating, but of “myself,” as being constituted (created) by my actions. In Dewart’s (1969) words:

I have tried to stress that in consciousness, in the process of self-creation, the creator is not an object, but a self. Likewise, what is created is not a human object, but a human self. [Humanity’s] creativity is self-creative not only in that he who creates is the same as that which is created, but also in the sense that what creates and what is created is a *self*. Hence, the self which creates itself need not be there prior to its self-creation. This is possible because the self, not being an object, does not create itself by acting upon itself. It would be closer to the truth to state that it creates itself by acting upon the [created] world.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ *Foundations of Belief*, p. 267.

Being conscious of myself, I am aware that my life differs from animal life as well as from divine life. And I am also a being who is present to myself through self-reflection. Animals cannot undertake such self-reflection to the best of my knowledge. My ordinary consciousness expresses itself in the relationships I establish within my experience. These relationships are not merely accidental without intent, but they are intentional on my part. That is, I knowingly know that I establish my relationships on purpose, with both animate and inanimate objects. My self-consciousness is a “philosophical advancement” over the traditional notion of simply knowing that I possess knowledge. To my knowledge, non-human animals, though living and conscious, cannot interpret life either philosophically or theologically. I, however, probe philosophically into my life, my *concrete* experience, and theologically into my *transcendental* (not merely metaphysical) life. Through these different activities, I recognize that a personal evolution of some sort is taking place. Stephan Strasser’s insights (1963) are helpful here.

Making use of an age-old comparison, one could speak here also of a light which makes the beings knowable and permits us to discover their goodness and beauty. Everything I see, I see in this light, but I myself am not this light....If we call ‘worldly’ everything appearing within the horizon of the world, then the ‘light’ which makes worldly beings appear is *transcendent* with respect to all worldly beings (Strasser’s italics).⁶⁰

And this transcendental light enlightens my consciousness as I live in its presence. Such recognition of the “light” that Strasser notes, results in a “coming of

⁶⁰ *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences: A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal*, pp. 221/222.

age” discovery of oneself. Dewart’s (1969) observation here is *à propos* to this understanding.

When human beings hanker after the Golden Age of childhood so badly that they begin to wish they had never been born it is time to try the hypothesis which no philosopher has, seemingly, tried before: that time moves forward, in one direction only, and that it can never move either too fast or too slow. Reality is historical. Evolution — let us face the fact — appears to be the rule of life.⁶¹

Revelation: Experiencing transcendence

Having reflected on my experience of the presence of God in the evolution of my life, I concluded that God’s self-revelation did not cease at a certain point in time in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, as I had been taught. God’s self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth is definitive but not concluded, I hold. My experience of the presence of God is more than an historical record of revelation that was completed in the past and reflected through the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Revelation, considered merely as a history that has been completed, deprives me of God’s immediate revealing presence. God’s presence in my life *is* God’s revelation, not in the sense of revealed principles of doctrine or dogma, but in the sense of some undefined “transcendent self” who is “not-me.” Dogma and doctrine are simply the intellectual concepts expressing my belief about being which I have either inherited, or conceived myself. They do not mediate the presence of God to me, rather, through them I try to “capture” my experience of the presence of God. In short, doctrine and dogma are expressions of God’s mysterious transcendence in my life. As such, they must

⁶¹ *Foundations of Belief*, p. 357.

evolve along with me or become obsolete in my life. Mel Thompson notes that in Zen Buddhism there are no concepts to capture the reality of what one believes. In Zen Buddhism concepts confuse reality. I suspect that the lack of concepts to capture belief may account for the absence of an understanding of evolution in Zen Buddhism. Thompson (1999) writes:

The problem is that most of the time we smother [our mind] with our narrowly egocentric conceptual thinking. We are not just to experience something, but must immediately start to conceptualize it, to love or hate it, to ask how it relates to us, to give it a particular value in our scheme of things. In this way, reality is lost in our clutter of thoughts and feelings.⁶²

But Western philosophy is not Zen Buddhism and cannot do without concepts. However, unlike the Hellenistic understanding of concepts (ideas), an evolutionary understanding of phenomenological notions means that one notion cannot be reduced to the potentiality of an earlier notion, as in traditional Western understanding. Thus, any new notion of revelation arising within my consciousness originates, or we could say emerges, as new from no previous fixed existence. That is to say, my Christian consciousness evolves and *discloses* something new that was not known to me before, not even potentially. In short, what is “new” was “there” before, but I had no consciousness of it.⁶³ In

⁶² *Eastern Philosophy*, p. 210.

⁶³ Again, Strasser’s (1963) insight is helpful. He writes: “We will say from now on that *every being as being contains a ‘pre-meaning.’* I do not know beforehand in what these pre-meanings consist and I cannot simply ‘read’ them in being. I know only that I am called to unfold something of this meaningfulness in signified meanings. It is perhaps in this call, in this vocation that lies the meaning of my being in the world” (p. 221, Strasser’s italics). If I have understood

other words, I consciously revitalize my present notion with each revelation as a new moment of existence. Within a phenomenological interpretation, the revelation contained in the New Testament was not potentially hidden in the Old Testament waiting to be exposed in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. Rather, revelation in the New Testament continues the present moment of self-disclosure of the historical life of Jesus of Nazareth, which in my life continues as the presence of the resurrected and transcendent Christ.

Consciousness: Thinking about thinking

I deliberately attempt to heighten my consciousness with the aid of both science and philosophy, philosophy being the preferred approach. That is because I am a thinking animal. In my philosophy, as I think about thinking, these questions arise: Will the evolution of my consciousness occur without my direction? To what extent is the evolution of my consciousness a part of a do-it-yourself enterprise? Has a Christian community the responsibility to promote an evolutionary development of doctrine? According to Gregory Baum (1968), “there are moments in the history of the Church — as she enters a new spiritual-cultural environment — when doctrinal development is non-homogeneous, the structural development in the Church need not always be thought of as homogeneous.”⁶⁴ If he is correct, has the Christian community abdicated its responsibility to change accordingly? I wonder.

My Christian faith is not a “natural religion” reflected in my way of thinking. Rather, I consciously

him correctly, Strasser’s pre-meaning may be interpreted as reality, “the mysterious beyond being,” within which I fashion my existence.
⁶⁴ *The Credibility of the Church Today: A Reply to Charles Davis*, p. 190.

have faith in what has been revealed to me. Within my consciousness, the meaning of revelation expands both in content and in dispute, or more positively, in “thought about thought.” Which is to say, dispute arises within philosophy. (The reader will no doubt recall that the Western etymological meaning of philosophy is “the love of wisdom.”) To express my religious consciousness in a contemporary manner suitable to my circumstances I must replace traditional “love of wisdom” with “thought about thought” (or, possibly thinking about wisdom). That is, thinking about thinking about the presence of God in my experience. In other words, in what deliberate and self-conscious ways do I think about God in my life? “Thought about thought” is the least objectionable short formula to define philosophy today according to Anthony Quinton (1977).⁶⁵ Any philosophical or scientific rejection about thinking about thought that supports my Christian inheritance would result in a self-mutilation of my consciousness.

I have changed as a person because my consciousness has changed. The deepening of my consciousness has re-defined me. I have become conscious of being constituted as a qualitative continuity, a *humanum*, that does not evolve as I evolve. That is to say, I “begin” as a human and I “end” as a human; I evolve but my humanity does not. Yet, my consciousness, not being an innate part of that *humanum*, but an acquired part, does evolve in its capacity to become deepened or heightened which amounts to the same activity. “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, thought like a child, and reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up my childish ways.” (1 Cor. 13:11)

⁶⁵ *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, p. 470, s. v. Philosophy.

As I give up my “childish ways,” I recognize that the presence of God in my life is identical with the possibility of a *new* life over and beyond the life I already have. My *initial* life was given without consulting me. The new life offered to me is offered in consultation with me as my conscious thought confirms. This new life must be freely accepted by me. In this new life, my religious experience is, in fact, ordinary experience that somehow extends me beyond myself, as it were. It extends me into experiencing the transcendent. Although, my religious experience, may be an ultimate experience, it is not a terminal experience within time. I continuously experience the gift of new life as a participation in ultimate reality, but not in merely duplicating that reality. In other words, my experience becomes that of a co-creator, not simply a creature. For a Christian, to “climb to the stars” in the theological sense could mean entry into the Kingdom of God. But not through the existing moral life of Judaism, but a new transcendental way of life available to all humanity. This transcendental way of life which is literally a new way to do things and to participate in the mystery of God at a new level of personal existence. In short, Dewart (1969) says that “God brings forth the being to which he gives the power effectively to define itself.”⁶⁶

Queer understanding and dehellenization

By now it may seem to the reader that I am venturing into uncharted philosophical waters strewn with floating intellectual minefields. I believe, however, that my efforts in this book are best understood from within a life of faith, that is, a life of belief *and* disbelief. Choosing what to believe and what not to believe is a process of

⁶⁶ *Foundations of Belief*, p. 386.

dehellenization. My exploration of a dehellenized consciousness is but an initial word on the subject. The possibility of a dehellenized consciousness concerning gay issues is the end goal of this brief work. As with any philosophical perspective, a dehellenized one is useful only on those individuals who choose to live by its insights and make it their own by incorporating their personal experience.⁶⁷

Intending an understanding of queer issues through the process of dehellenization, I probe into the classical philosophical views that many still believe have been vested with the certitude of faith and the authority of revelation, particularly within Catholic understanding. Doctrine and dogma, if understood as true and fixed in themselves, can be mistaken for the truth of revelation and the certitude of faith. Thus, it is nothing less than the nature of a dehellenized consciousness that I investigate here. And a new philosophical understanding of consciousness is needed. In this new understanding truth is confirmed in the relationship by the fidelity of my consciousness to my experience, and is not realized in an intellectual conformity to an external ideal. My mind does not, in any manner, duplicate the truth existing outside of my experience by making a fixed philosophical ideal of it. Rather, truth, as fidelity of my consciousness to my experience is perpetually evolving along with my personal awareness.

⁶⁷ My primary intention is that the reader integrate himself or herself into the philosophical process of dehellenization. Throughout these essays I have adapted my purposes following the four goals of an author, as identified by Mario Valdés (1982:174). [1] The author may choose to take the reader along a development which is largely in agreement with his/her own sense of reality. [2] The author can try to transform the reader's sense of reality. [3] The author can be primarily concerned with an expansion of awareness on the part of the reader. [4] The author may choose to integrate the reader into the philosophical process itself.

To dehellenize is to re-conceptualize what it means to enquire, to speculate and to theorize without relying on the ancient Greek philosophical perspective. Thus, I must conceptualize my thoughts existentially, that is, derive my norms for interpretation from my current experience. This is the task of philosophers schooled in Modernity. Philosophical hellenization impedes the possibility of a change in matters of official church doctrine. Thus, a challenge for me, for gay Catholics, or any other Catholic for that matter, is to overcome the teaching of a church whose doctrine is experienced by me as untrue, or lacking fidelity to experience.

Incarnated sexuality

Accepting that sexuality is the metaphysical reality and sex is the concrete (physical) reality, an anthropological philosophy of sexual incarnation could present an opportunity for a *new theological* understanding of human sexuality. As Lisa Isherwood (2015) notes: “Perhaps we can argue that theology that has incarnation at its heart is queer indeed, what else so fundamentally challenges the nature of human and divine identity.”⁶⁸ A challenge for understanding contemporary sexuality is not how to defend a concept of straight sexuality against a concept of queer sexuality. Rather, the challenge is how to take advantage of the evolution of consciousness of the human sexual experience in order to understand sexuality.

Once I consciously understand that God has a special relationship with me as a sexual person, being gay or straight, I must bring that relationship into my religious experience and faithfully and truly reflect God’s image and likeness in my day-to-day affairs.

⁶⁸ Christianity: *Queer Pasts, Queer Futures?* p. 1351.

THE CREED DEHELLENIZED

Earlier, I introduced the notion that human consciousness is the ability to construct an interpretive metaphysics. Although not perfect, such an ability may give consolation to queer individuals concerning their relationship to the faith. Such consolation modern science and technology cannot give, although they make attempts to console through the removal of ignorance. I suspect that Dewart is correct in his observations throughout his works that the consolation of philosophy for us is that science has performed even more badly than philosophy concerning the interpretation of the faith. Even though not perfect, philosophical consolation has been given through belief that has supported the creeds. The creeds, which were composed by the early church to express what is (was) believed by the faithful and what is required by orthodox belief, are normative for the Christian faith. The problem for us today is that a Hellenist metaphysics underpins the original composition of the creeds as well as the language used to express what is believed. In an attempt to overcome the limitations of Hellenistic philosophy, Christian philosophers and theologians have often used the term “light” intellectually to mean “light from God.” History shows a great variation in philosophical perspectives here.

Strasser (1963) has noted:

The greatest metaphysical thinkers have tried to penetrate into the darkness of this mystery [metaphysics], but the fundamental intuitions underlying their ideas differ from one another....The light which makes material beings knowable is a reflexion of eternal and immutable ideas (Plato). The pre-meaning of things owes its source to God, the Creator, to whose ideas the being and essence of things corresponds (Thomas

Aquinas). The meaningfulness of nature is the expression of a self-thinking Consciousness (Spinoza). The pre-meaning arises from aprioristic forms of the human intellect and from the necessary ideas governing the use of human reason (Kant). The Absolute Mind, estranged from itself becomes itself again because in the course of history it explains its own pre-meaning in constantly clearer meanings (Hegel). The light is the Truth of Being which alone makes it possible to understand being as being (Heidegger).⁶⁹

With respect to the “Light”, I introduce the thinking of a Quaker, Paul Trudinger, on the creed as an example of a dehellenized metaphysics within theology. He presents an understanding of a dehellenized creed arising from his “intensive journal,” as he calls it. Without using the term “dehellenization” Trudinger (1988) wrote concerning the motivation for his brief book: “I hope this testimony and the reasons which impel me in these directions may be of help to others who are so constituted as to be having similar doubts *and* convictions” about their belief (Trudinger’s italics).⁷⁰ To help the reader recognize the difference between a Hellenized and a dehellenized belief I have arranged some of Trudinger’s thought in the following table. Of course, I am solely responsible for any inaccuracy in presenting his thoughts.

⁶⁹ *Phenomenology and the Human Sciences. A Contribution to a New Scientific Ideal*, p. 221.

⁷⁰ *Leaves from the Notebook of an Unashamed Heretic*, p. 3.

The Creed

I believe in one God, the Father Almighty...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

“God” has come to have rather specific definition: particular qualities or attributes have been given to God both by systematic theologians and by the accepted folk-culture which has held sway in Christendom (and in a great part of Judaism too, for that matter.) I suppose to be honest I do not believe in God that way.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

Yes, I believe in one God. I believe there is in this world a spirit of Love and Justice which is operative both within us human beings and outside of us as well. “Justice” means right-relationships within ourselves, between ourselves and others on personal, social and international, political levels.

...the Maker of heaven and earth and of all things visible and invisible...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

Who or what did cause the universe, or more limitedly, this natural world, to be? Surely it must have had an intelligent maker? (A conclusion from logical philosophy.)

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I personally do not find it necessary to believe so. Neither I nor anyone else alive knows for sure about the origins of the physical world. On this matter of origins it seems we must be reverently agnostic.

...in one Lord Jesus Christ...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

There is no doubt that the writers of most of the books in the New Testament believed and proclaimed that Jesus was this figure, sent by God to inaugurate God's kingly rule. God's anointed were human kings who ruled visibly in God's name or God's stead. The Creed states that Jesus was begotten not just "this day" as were the kings of Israel and Judah, but eternally begotten of the Father.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I am not nearly so sure that Jesus thought of himself in this way. In any case, does the fact that a group of Messiah-expecting Jewish people in the First Century of the Common Era who believed in a scheme of world history culminating in the inauguration of God's Kingdom mean that it is appropriate for us in the closing stages of the Twentieth Century to believe it?

...being of one substance with the Father...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

The Creed is asserting the essential "Godness" or deity of Jesus. (In short, it makes Jesus equal to God.)

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

"Being of one substance with the Father:" would have had a technical philosophical meaning at the time of the formulation of this Creed, when the world view was dominated by "substance" philosophy, a view I believe to be quite untenable now with the advent of quantum physics.

...and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the Virgin Mary...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

From the orthodox point of view the Virgin Birth is confessed as a physical miracle. Mary did not have intercourse with a human male in order to conceive the child Jesus. Many modern orthodox Christians seem to insist on the traditional interpretations of this doctrine as essential to Christian faith.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I must record my belief that to assert belief in the biologically miraculous birth of Jesus as somehow central and essential to there being a vital community of faith, experiencing the presence and power of God, makes no sense to me. It simply doesn't correspond with my experience, nor to the experience of many other vital Christians.

...on the third day he rose again...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is considered by most Christians to be the corner-stone of the Christian faith. The traditional sense means that Jesus, dead on the cross on Friday, was miraculously brought back to life “on the third day,” that is, the following Sunday.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I wish to say that I cannot see why such a miraculous event, witnessed at its actual occurrence by no-one, but testified in the years immediately following the crucifixion only by those who were already Jesus' followers, should be the foundation for faith in what Jesus taught and demonstrated in his lifetime. I believe in the resurrection in this sense. It is a quality of life lived in the presence of, and by the enlivening energy of the Spirit of Love and Justice.

...he will come again in glory...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

We can trace in the Synoptic tradition the development of the idea that the end of this age would be marked by the coming again of Jesus. The “Second Coming” is strongly believed and vigorously preached by conservative Protestant groups. It is given a place in the more mainstream churches in their “Statements of Faith” and “Creeds.”

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I do not believe that Jesus himself taught that he would return in a personal, visible, bodily way to this earth. I arrive at that conclusion not because I find the idea in any way unpalatable, but because a careful study of the New Testament evidence seems to me to indicate it.

...He (God) has spoken through the prophets...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

I believe those who hammered out this Creed wished to assert that the prophets of Israel whose oracles were recorded in the Scriptures are the definitive examples of the Holy Spirit speaking to and through human persons.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I am pleading for a much broader and richer understanding of this witness to God’s liberating Love. There can be no definitive examples, for God can neither be defined nor confined. God may speak a word that the whole human race needs to hear through you or through a Buddhist mystic.

...I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic church...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

I have to ask just what are we understanding “the church” to be? Many believers in “the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church” do seem still to regard the Christian Church as in some way “more equal” than others in the world-wide community of faith.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

I realize that there is an institution called “the church.” And there is a great deal of good in it and to be said about it. But that it exhausts the meaning of “the church” I do not believe. Do not misunderstand me. I am not arguing for some invisible, ethereal reality. I am speaking about a community or fellowship of actual persons with all the clay that clings to us. The church is visible. And inasmuch as it gathers visibly there will be some forms of organization, ritual behaviours and so forth. And within the institutional church the “church” that I am speaking of and believe in can certainly be found.

...I acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins...

HELLENIZED BELIEF

It has often been interpreted as affirming that the act of baptism by water actually washes away the stain of our sinfulness, that it removes the deeply-dyed defilement of “original sin.” That is to say that the very act of being baptized regenerates us and that to die “unbaptized” is to die “in sin” and in a state of being under God’s condemnation.

DEHELLENIZED BELIEF

The much briefer “Apostles Creed” makes no mention of baptism but plainly affirms: I believe in the forgiveness of sins.

In providing a brief Postscript to his review of the creed of which the above examples are but a small sample, as well as other issues, Trudinger speaks briefly about his faith stance concerning sexual morality. Although he makes no mention of homosexuality, I believe his thoughts are worth quoting somewhat extensively and may be applicable to queer studies.

Finally, let us look briefly at the implications of my faith stance for behaviours in the area of sexual morality. Within the framework of the traditional view of God and of God's laws, the prescriptions and proscriptions regarding sexual behaviour are quite clear and rigid, although the behaviours of many highly regarded persons in the Biblical record are much more morally ambiguous. I am quite aware of the great complexities involved in the wonderful depth of a loving sexual relationship and a very great sense of responsibility and integrity is required in this area of morality. Yet it quite plainly is an area where much fear of the judgment of God, who is thought of as having made the exclusivity rule, has produced many unhealthy and sad situations. Not as many probably as has the careless using of persons as sexual partners produced, yet so many that a new look at the traditional model is needed. "Responsibility ethics" are much harder to practice than "rule obedience" ethics, but the Spirit of Love and Justice enables us to be responsible in our use of freedom, I believe. I am also uneasy, I want to add, when I see what happens when people let go of all sense of responsibility and restraint especially in the area of human sexual practices where I find a great deal of the exercise of freedom to be quite irresponsible (p. 53).

He concludes his book by noting, “On the sundial outside of the Friends’ Meeting House in Florida Ave., Washington, D.C., these words are engraved: I MIND THE LIGHT, DOST THOU?

§

PHILOSOPHY IN A NEW KEY

An alternative discourse

As a Christian philosopher, I must find a way of making space for various kinds of philosophical discourse in the church and not rely solely on the classical philosophical perspective. In attempting to understand homosexuality, one such alternative philosophical discourse has been introduced by Michel Foucault (1926-1984). From Foucault's sociological perspective, discourses are understood in terms of the knowledge and power that are inherent in them and, as such, play a major role in understanding homosexuality. George Drazenovich (2010) notes that "as a historical matter, Foucault suggests that in the Western world, secularity as a political, medical and juridical discourse accelerated in the 18th and 19th centuries," along with the power they represented.⁷¹ I have this type of secular philosophical discourse in mind as I present a reflective and historical account of the development of my philosophical thinking from my undergraduate years to the writing of this book — arriving not at the classical perspective, but a phenomenological one — but not one that is necessarily exclusively secular.

Like many other students throughout history, I began serious philosophical questioning during my undergraduate years while studying classical philosophy at a Catholic college. Later, I came to view classical philosophy as inadequate for my theological interpretation. But, this development was not immediate, nor total. Initially, I began taking from classical philosophy what worked and rejected what was irrelevant in my experience at that time. And ultimately came to

⁷¹ *Foucauldian Analysis of Homosexuality*, p. 3.

realize that classical philosophy is not the necessary and unique philosophical underpinning of human thinking. Alternatives are possible.

These days, I undertake my theological interpretation from within a dehellenized philosophy. A dehellenized understanding is not a fixed understanding but a dynamic point of view that is perpetually undergoing evolution and reconstruction. In short, dehellenized understanding is a phenomenological point of view. Currently, I interpret philosophy and theology phenomenologically through the relationships that I cultivate within my community of faith. The question that I had often asked myself amounted to: Am I to consciously construct the future of my belief, or am I to remain satisfied with a pre-critical, inherited belief? Looking to the future, the problem is that it is not easy to give any concrete shape to the final goal in my life. However, I try to accomplish in my life what is similar to what philosophers have always tried to accomplish. That is, to arrange my ideas into an insightful mosaic of a personal, but not private, set of meanings – and in my case, inspired by Leslie Dewart's (1989) project.⁷²

The shift to a new philosophical genre

Earning a D. Th. degree marked the beginning of a new chapter in my theological thinking that would lead to the authoring of a variety of books. These books reveal how my philosophical and theological thinking has been continually developing. Although not initially intended, as such, when combined they form a type of intellectual history of the development of my thought, as it were. My philosophical and theological development would eventually lead me to recognize that the interpretation of

⁷² *Evolution and Consciousness. The Role of Speech in the Origin and Development of Human Nature*, p. xi.

queer issues as they are developing today need an appropriate philosophical and theological underpinning. Traditional theology fails in establishing an appropriate interpretation of queer experience because of its inadequate classical epistemological principles. This is not to gainsay any scientific, psychological, social or cultural efforts at understanding queer issues. I am not alone in understanding this inadequacy. Concerning the role of phenomenology as it replaces classical philosophy, Ronald Long (1995) concludes:

I know full well that phenomenology fails as a science. What I hope is that I have given an account which is sufficiently true to sever the equation of treating another as a sexual object with abuse and to establish a recognition of the validity that casual sex can have in the life of a gay man as a vehicle of his 'humanization' — a process which some of us recognize as the substance of spirituality.⁷³

Phenomenological interpretation, the basis for my doctoral degree, became the new way I theologically reinterpreted my experience free from the constraints of classical understanding. I do not say that classical understanding is erroneous, but rather that it is inadequate for the contemporary interpretation of my experience. My experience of the inadequacy of classical philosophy, that had been growing since I entered university, soon became philosophical dissatisfaction. And that dissatisfaction translated into a sense of rootlessness regarding my philosophical belief which I eventually concluded was due to this outdated classical philosophy. But there is more.

⁷³ *Toward a Phenomenology of Gay Sex: Groundwork for a Contemporary Sexual Ethics*, p. 105.

The fact was that I was searching for a new philosophical *genre* to interpret my experience. I took heart when I discovered within my studies that Vatican II had embraced a phenomenological approach to the understanding of itself — even if many delegates who attended the Council did not recognize, nor understand what they were living through in attempting an *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* of the teaching of the Catholic faith. The *aggiornamento* and *ressourcement* approaches to interpreting the church's teaching led to my religious self-transformation which was no longer an accommodation of my will to that of another, but an act of adjustment in my relationships between and among those around me, including God. In short, adjustment to the *presence* of God replaced accommodation to the *will* of God. Adjustments concerning my relationship with God meant that I had “come of age” responsibly in living my life. God was not totally responsible for everything anymore. I was now co-responsible with God in living out my life.

The realization that God was not responsible for everything anymore amounted to a philosophical shock for me. However, it did mark a definite and identifiable turning point in my thinking. It opened the door whereby I changed my attitude and disposition to my future and realized that I was a co-responsible agent with God in creating the culture and society of my life-world.

Eventually, in co-creating my life-world I accepted faith, not as a “gift” or ability to believe given to me from outside by another agency, i.e., God. Rather, I became conscious of my faith as an act of understanding *within* God.⁷⁴ Within the presence of God, I began to

⁷⁴ If I were writing in Greek, I would write *ἐν* (in) for “within,” suggesting the notion of “already being within being.” I would not write *εἰς* (into) for “within” which suggests “moving into being,” from the outside.

deconstruct my inherited Hellenist philosophy which eventually led to my abandonment of classical metaphysics in interpreting my experience. In short, I reorganized the metaphysics of my theology and as of late taking into account the insights of “quantum” thought. Within this process, the realization that theology was no longer the “Queen of the Sciences” required a significant intellectual adjustment. I had first encountered this notion of theology as “Queen of the Sciences” in my undergraduate years. At that time, I had no sense of the profound effect it was to have on my philosophical inheritance and would have on my future philosophical development. The theological insights of George Tyrrell (1861-1909), an underappreciated Irish-English theologian, caught my attention at university. I recognized that much of my thought was, in fact, resonating with his. In delving into his life and work I found sound philosophical support for replacing my classical philosophical inheritance with a phenomenological perspective. And therein began my entry into the deliberate dehellenization of Western philosophical understanding.

Encountering George Tyrrell’s works marked the beginning of a shift in reinterpreting my experience from a negative (deconstructive) to a positive (reconstructive) approach in developing a new philosophical understanding, that is, doing philosophy (and theology) in a new key. My question was no longer: What are *you* going to do about this problem, Lord? But, rather: What are *we* going to do about this problem, Lord? In other words, I included myself in the question and in its solution. The process of reconstructing my philosophy phenomenologically takes on the awareness that subjectivity and objectivity are not to be confused with subjectivism and objectivism. I continue to engage the world I have inherited (objectivity) *and* the world that I

have constituted for myself (subjectivity). But, objectivity and subjectivity do not constitute two worlds in themselves, but only the one world of which I am consciousness. As phenomenologically understood, objectivity and subjectivity are poles of meaning, not poles of fact. That is to say that in the world of concrete reality there are facts which are “there” as an independent reality distinct from the meaning that I assign to them.

Today, my approach to philosophical understanding and subsequent theological construction is outside the guild of classical theological argument. The theological reflection that I now undertake in an ecclesial context differs from the reflection I undertook in my former ecclesiastical context. Although my thinking may have begun in the formality of the academy (university), it has not remained in the formality of the academy. My thinking addresses the questions and problems that arise within all contexts of my experience including those questions that address informally queer consciousness.

I am often led to ask myself: Is church membership a prerequisite for doing theology? Can I consciously construct Catholic theology outside of the revelation of Christ? My answer, to date, is that in order to construct a Catholic theology, I need to “enchurch” my thinking somehow. To “enchurch” my thinking, however, is not dependent upon the doctrinal or dogmatic ecclesiastical ideas of a classical period. Rather, enchurching my theology includes the reading and digesting of texts of other philosophers and theologians, who raise existential philosophical questions and not just those questions applicable to institutional Christendom. In other words, I take into account the relationship between the belief of the church community and the belief of the non-church community and, as well, the difference that it makes.

Existential questions, not ones of idealism, preoccupy me today. Even so, I may not know how to

ask all the right questions, much less have all the right answers. My philosophy and theology are nothing but the *interpretation* of my religious experience, a philosophical concern; not an *explanation* of my religious experience, a scientific concern. As a philosopher/theologian, there are certain negative experiences that need to be acknowledged in my life. They are fear, despair, suffering, guilt and death. Yet, these experiences disclose only one part of my existence, the human part (*a partis hominis*).⁷⁵ They do not constitute any part of God (*a parte Dei*), which casts out fear, replaces despair with hope, alleviates suffering, absolves guilt, and overcomes death. In short, *a partis hominis* and *a parte Dei* constitute two poles of understanding within my consciousness.

An altered theological future

In my initial philosophical contemplation, that is, in my pre-phenomenological days, I found myself living a life that I did not make or design, but had inherited. In all that, however, I knew that I could not stop my life from continually evolving and I saw indications of an alternative philosophical understanding leading to an altered theological future. As I see it, the possible reshaping of the future, through theology in a new key, is but the other side of analyzing the past. In this process, I understand the past as not merely *related to* the present but as *leading to* the present. In other words, I look at the conscious choices that brought me to the present moment. Given that context, my reflections in these

⁷⁵ Here I follow Kant's (1959:52) comment in his *Prolegomena*. "Now experience does indeed teach me what exists and what it is like, but never that it must *necessarily* be so and not otherwise" (my italics). That is, life need not be lived negatively, I can adopt a positive attitude.

essays continue the *unfinished theological business* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, namely the so-called Modernist Movement, or Modernist Crisis, if viewed from within the church's perspective.⁷⁶

My work as a theologian today is undertaken differently than such work undertaken in the days of the theological systems which dominated the medieval universities. Developments in philosophy have always preceded developments in theology; similar to myth and folk lore preceding philosophy. In light of the history of human thinking there is likely to be no final philosophy or theology. Given that understanding, I see my task as primarily to make known, or to provide interpretive approaches to the abiding truths of Christianity for future generations. My quest for "truth" today requires that philosophy be undertaken in a new key. Philosophy in a new key is the quest for being oneself within the evolution of the world. But not in the process of the evolution that brought "humanity down from the trees," but, rather in the evolutionary process that may make it possible for humanity "to climb to the stars" through a self-directed stage of development, something the brute animal cannot do. To this end, and in the particular case of Queer Studies, I attempt to re-evaluate the relationship between philosophical belief and a consciously queer theology. Philosophical understanding of theology ranks

⁷⁶ The chief understanding of ecclesiastical modernism has been as a label for the outlook of a group of Roman Catholic thinkers. This group was given both its public identity and its (seeming) death sentence by the encyclical *Pascendi* issued by Pope Pius X in 1907. Its leaders were George Tyrrell (1861-1909) in England, Alfred Loisy (1857-1940) in France, and Ernesto Buonaiuti (1881-1946) in Italy, priests who felt challenged by the critical studies of Christianity's origins. They regarded Roman Catholic dogmas and devotions as valuable, and helpful symbols of faith and the spiritual life, but they believed that a fuller Catholicism (better known today as Catholicity) was being born.

first in the chronological order of knowledge. However, for the Christian an understanding of theology is primary within the moral order of knowledge. And any contemporary understanding must preserve this order.

To my mind, Leslie Dewart's understanding of "dehellenization," not to be confused with "unhellenization," provides an opportunity for a fresh reflection upon philosophy. After graduation, I followed Leslie Dewart's thinking, not to know primarily "what he had in mind," but rather, "what I had in mind." Today, knowing what I have in mind, requires understanding my *consciousness*, or my capacity to be cognizant, which enables me to take on a creative role in life. Phenomenological consciousness, or what is the same thing, dehellenized consciousness, is not on a par with normal consciousness. Phenomenological consciousness raises my philosophical awareness to *a higher level of intelligibility* than classical understanding which lacks the capacity to express contemporary experience. It is unfortunate at this time in the advancement of ideas in the Western world that the place of philosophy in relation to theology seems to have been usurped, to a great degree, by sociology and psychology which have their roots in Hellenistic understanding. Mel Thompson (1999) has expressed metaphorically, what I have suspected for some time now, that with sociology and psychology dominating the philosophical field "much western philosophy stopped playing the game and merely analyzed the rule-book."⁷⁷

Ultimately, I may have to recognize divergent philosophical interpretations of theology and accept them accordingly. That is not to say, however, I must embrace all of them equally. To date, I have come to understand that I live as a co-creator, not just as a creature, within the

⁷⁷ *Eastern Philosophy*, p. 2.

felt presence of God. And through my co-creator activity I recognize that my self-fulfillment is intrinsically related to my self-realization. As a religious person my self-fulfillment and self-realization are no longer satisfied through an idealistic understanding of divinity. What I make myself to be, my self-realization in other words, discloses my unique status within the presence of God, thereby constituting my self-fulfillment.

My self-realization, or “making myself to be” is philosophically reminiscent of Immanuel Kant’s (1959) perspective. I know that I exist, since I cannot consciously negate myself within the presence of God, “which one must always represent to oneself *only* as the effect of a force of which we do not have the subject” (my italics). ⁷⁸ However, readers of these essays will recognize that, unlike Kant, I do not understand God as a “force,” but as a “presence.” Given this perspective, there are significant positive implications for queer individuals who attempt to think philosophically (and theologically) in a new key.

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⁷⁸ *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics that will be Able to Present Itself as a Science*, p. 98.

A CONSCIOUS ATTEMPT AT CONSTRUCTING QUEER THEOLOGY

This chapter consists of a composition, the core of which I solicited from a gay individual and subsequently edited. We share a very similar understanding of philosophy and theology. The chapter is written in the first person singular as if I were its sole author.

In this essay, I present the process that led me to undertake a personal, but not private, attempt at constructing a queer theology. It is a Christian theology articulated from a subjective point of view. More importantly, however, it is a theological understanding by a gay person undertaken from within a community of faith. From a moral point of view straight theology, rather the interpretation of straight theology, confronts me in my moral life and is of questionable value to me. I need a queer theology that says something to me about God and our relationship. There is a vast difference in interpretation of some issues between the world that produces straight theology and the world in which I live as a queer and a believer in God. The process I envision in order to construct a queer theology, is that I must first enter the world of straight theology, determine through an historical and evolutionary perspective what it signifies and only then can I say what it means for me today in my experience.

In undertaking a theological construction, which is an on-going process, I engage both the world I inherited and the world I subsequently constituted for myself. By constituting my world I mean organizing that collection of experiences of which I am conscious and giving them meaning. This organized understanding constitutes my “home-world.” Many things exist concretely outside my home-world that have no meaning for me at all. Although

they are there and have meaning for others. It is phenomenological philosophy that underpins the interpretation of my experiences and my theological understanding.

As a gay person, I find it significant that traditional Christian theology has been constructed upon the presumption that straight people are its exclusive originators and custodians. They have incorporated their particular values and biases into the teaching of the church. This straight theology has been universalized by the church, primarily through its missionary efforts and orthodox teaching which is often hostile to LGBT issues of sexuality, as many ecclesiastical publications attest. And not to be ignored are the particular passages hostile to homosexuality in the scriptures sacred to Jews and Christians.

In this essay I contrast my queer theological understanding to traditional straight theological understanding, which I have come to realize has been influenced by an ancient Greek philosophy that is no longer viable for me. Whether or not my contrasting perspective will have effects in public attitudes and bring about a change in them is yet to be seen.

My early experiences as a gay adolescent and young adult, which I kept secret until my mid-fifties, were more positive than negative. This was partly due to the fact that I am naturally a cheerful and optimistic person who believes that life is basically good. Among the earliest memories I can recall are memories of pleasant sexual feelings, both heterosexual and homosexual. In hindsight, however, the same-sex feelings were the more intense. From early childhood I had a sense that I was part of a larger scheme of life than my immediate family. I sensed, without understanding it, that there was something greater, yet somewhat unknown to me, in whose presence I was living.

In the process of contemplating a queer theology, I no longer use a classical metaphysical approach to interpret my theology. Not the metaphysical idealism of classical philosophy, but a personal and reasoned consciousness constitutes my understanding today. My philosophical understanding originates in the mystery of my human sexuality, which includes physically my body and metaphysically my mind. By being a conscious *and* a reasonable person I dehellenize my thinking that was expressed within a classical perspective.

Within an *ecclesial* community I have come to accept God's revelation in a queer-friendly way. The ecclesial community, and I do not mean an *ecclesiastical* community, is a "called" community responding to a divine summons addressed to both gay and straight individuals. Being gay affords me an experience, unique in character, as I live *in* faith and *by* grace. In this context I construct an appropriate queer-friendly theology to express my religious experience. I cannot undertake the construction of my theology in a negative self-critical or self-isolating manner. Philosophers and theologians who have no sense of the presence of God, or of a transcendent reality in their lives may find themselves in opposition internally with themselves and externally with their community. Such a context of negativity is not suitable to develop any theology. Any philosophy I construct must be supported by the positive characteristics of self-discovery and the positive worth as to who I am in the presence of God. Thus, my theology is based upon the experience of a positive relationship between God and me that has actually been established. This is a relationship of love. A love that meets my needs and furthers my spiritual growth. It is more than mere romantic love. And, as I have mentioned elsewhere, this does not prevent dispute in a healthy sense with others or with God.

As a gay person and a theologian I am always looking for new and meaningful ways to interpret my religious experience within my queer life-style. This often leads me to look outside the traditional norms of the church. I do have a developing sense that traditional doctrine and dogma are but “fossils of a passing God,” as it were, and no longer adequate. Although, I do not consider the philosophical legacy of the past as hardened and dead and of no use within my present situation. As I see it, my theology must incorporate my gay temperament and world-view in a new way with the re-evaluated understanding of the mind of philosophers and theologians of the past. I undertake all this within a dehellenized perspective which I have detailed elsewhere.⁷⁹

In my dehellenized theology I distinguish between my Christian experience and my secular experience which for a long time I had taken to be synonymous. In my youth, Western culture was generally religious and as yet secularism had not assumed a dominant position in society. Secularism notwithstanding, however, I believe that queer theology is an alternative way of religious thinking that transcends Western secular culture. In fact, I dare to suggest that queer theology might even present a new hermeneutic for a variety of Christian experiences of sexuality.

Individuals who seek God’s love, be they straight or gay, are more likely first to feel their relationship with God, then understand it consciously and reasonably. At least, that has been my experience. First, I felt God’s love (as a physical presence, not merely an affection) then formulated my experience of it. Once formulated, my experience of God’s love led me deeper into the truth. I

⁷⁹ Dehellenization is a positive term meaning the conscious creation of an alternative future for belief. See my *Dehellenization and Dr. Dewart Revisited: A First Person Philosophical Reflection*.

make no claim that my understanding of queer theology sets the criterion for anyone else's judgment, but only that it expresses God's love for me and *may* be useful for others. Thus, my queer theology is more than a "pastoral" re-assessment and re-formulation of straight theological perspectives. It is an altered presentation seen through a queer consciousness that may be able to reflect both gay and straight perspectives. "Queer" may be more insightful than "straight," in understanding human sexuality than vice versa.

I prefer philosophy in formulating my queer theology rather than other disciplines such as sociology or psychology. Philosophy addresses more suitably the deeper questions arising in my mind. Furthermore, philosophical insights give rise to a queer theology may be applicable, with appropriate adaptations, to Jewish and Islamic theology since "queerness" transcends cultural and religious traditions. I believe that Marc Oraison (1977) was heading in the right direction when he concluded:

We have seen that the condition of a person with homosexual tendencies is rooted in the strange incompleteness of *all* human sexuality. Homosexual life is not something apart. It is one version, among others, of the fundamental human tragedy. This tragedy is a question beyond any science or rational explanation, yet through faith it acquires meaning. Through Christ triumphant in death, all suffering is revelation, birth, a personal Way of the Cross. So it is that a homosexual can say with all of us: 'In my own body I make up what is lacking from the sufferings of Christ' (my italics).⁸⁰

Taking my thinking one step further, my approach to queer theology is not to be confused with religious

⁸⁰ *The Homosexual Question*, p. 131.

studies about queerness which seems to be trending these days. It is too personal for that. Religious studies is an academic discipline that attaches to the social order of any given culture. Whereas, theology is a religious philosophy for life and attaches to the person in any given culture. It is a “creed of life” for the person.⁸¹

My attempt at constructing a queer theology is nothing less than the understanding of a personal, religious (loving) relationship with God. Western culture, at the present time, lacks an accepted queer theological language about meaning, value and experience that would allow a successful dialogue to take place in the public forum, or even among the Christian faithful. As a Christian philosopher, I have an obligation to somehow integrate my gay experience into the tradition of the faith of the church.

For many LGBT individuals, our experience is that we are estranged from the religion in which we were born. This estrangement is due in part, I believe, to the literal inability of conventional Christianity (and by extension Judaism and Islam) to support a positive queer perspective in its theology. In addition, the “death” of God in our secular culture, or at least the death of the traditional idea of God in our day to day experience, contributes to this estrangement.

In formulating an approach to queer theology, I try to impart the abiding truths of Christianity to this generation and in particular to future generations. I believe that the principle merit and usefulness of my queer theology is its potential to satisfy the expectations for change in the doctrine of the church concerning its understanding of human sexuality. In the meantime, a dehellenized

⁸¹ Significantly, Leslie Dewart in his PhD thesis, “Development of Karl Pearson’s Scientific Philosophy” (1954), quotes Pearson as seeking a “creed of life” in a philosophical outlook since the creeds of traditional religion had not been able to satisfy him.

philosophy which is a prerequisite for my queer theology, may offer the faithful some consolation. My intent does not differ too greatly from that of Boethius (c.480-524) who wrote a book entitled, *On the Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius sought to answer religious questions without reference to Christianity, relying solely on natural philosophy and the Classical Greek tradition. (Where Boethius thought within the Greek philosophical tradition in seeking the harmony of faith and reason, I probe into the contemporary understanding of human consciousness.) The truths found in Christianity would be no different from the truths found in philosophy, he believed. I believe the truth conceived through consciousness is the truth of Christianity.

No two theologians, gay or straight, construct their world views identically. Theological world views are always nuanced. Each individual person constructs a unique personal centre of meaning out of the experience of this world. According to John de Satgé theologians of the late 20th century have welcomed the humanitarian elements that have arisen within our secular world. With due acknowledgement to Avery Dulles (*The Resilient Church*) de Satgé (1981) notes thirteen themes arising within modernity that can constitute an examination of conscience, as it were, for theologians. They are:

- Modern thought is superior to all past forms of understanding reality, and is therefore normative for Christian faith and life.
- Religious statements are totally independent of reasonable discourse.
- Religious language refers to human experience and nothing else, God being humanity's noblest creation.
- Jesus can only be understood in terms of contemporary models of humanity.

- All religions are equally valid; the choice among them is not a matter of conviction about truth but only of personal preference or lifestyle.
- To realize one's potential and to be true to oneself is the whole meaning of salvation.
- Since what is human is good, evil can be understood as failure to realize human potential.
- The sole purpose of worship is to promote individual self-realization and human community.
- Institutions and historical traditions are oppressive and inimical to our being truly human; liberation from them is required for authentic existence and authentic religion.
- The world must set the agenda for the Church. Social, political, and economic programs to improve the quality of life are ultimately normative for the Church's mission in the world.
- An emphasis on God's transcendence is at least a hindrance to, and perhaps incompatible with, Christian social concern and action.
- The struggle for a better humanity will bring about the Kingdom of God.
- The question of hope beyond death is irrelevant or at best marginal to the Christian understanding of human fulfillment.⁸²

I encourage the reader to re-read these statements, if necessary, until the subtle point of contest is recognized.

To my mind, no absolute agreement or interpretive harmony should be presumed among theologians, queer or straight, concerning the interpretation of their experience. Interpretive harmony does not concern the similarity of interpretation. The problem of interpretive harmony is the inability of contemporary experience, individual and collective, to be resolved by classical

⁸² *Peter and the Single Church*, p. 87.

philosophy. This lack of resolution suggests that an alternative philosophy is needed. Historically, it is clear that to a great degree the failure of classical philosophy gave rise to the contemporary problem. My resolution to this problem, with regard to human sexuality, is in accord with Ronald Long (1995) who wrote:

Barring the not very helpful approach of Plato...and whatever might be gleaned from the use of religious imagery in the tradition of romance, the resources of the Western tradition proffer precious little for those who would understand the spiritual dimensions of sex, for sustained phenomenological attention to sex remains one of the glaring lacunae in our inherited analysis.⁸³

Since queer theology is constructed within the *sensus fidelium* of the church, this presents a critical opportunity in which the community of faith, as well as myself, may grow in God's grace. In constructing my theology, I realized that I needed to become an agent for change both within myself and in my environment. I cannot remain passive and accept uncritically the ideas and beliefs inherited from my past. The question has become how to construct a queer theology through satisfactory and contemporary concepts while being faithful to Christian understanding.

In this regard the community of faith, on its part, can exercise a pastoral role regarding queerness, if it so chooses. How can queer theology be pastoral, one might ask? It is pastoral:

1. In the way that it addresses the problems of a believer who is queer, offers moral advice and new solutions for self-acceptance in and by society.

⁸³ *Toward a Phenomenology of Gay Sex: Groundwork for a Contemporary Sexual Ethics*, p. 70.

2. In the way that it calls upon the foundational traditions about Jesus of Nazareth and how these ideas structure and enrich the variety of ways we live.
3. In the way that it makes a demand on the church to become further practically acculturated in postmodern society to queer issues while remaining faithful to the gospel.

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ADDENDUM: HOLY CONVERSATIONS

Talking About Homosexuality: A Congregational Resource by K. P. Oliveto, K. D. Turney and T. C. West.

The above book on queer theology is meant to encourage conversations between LGBT and straight individuals. *Talking About Homosexuality* offers a series of workshops and techniques to make this happen within religious congregations *in good faith*. Such conversations need: 1) to commit to taking risks among participants, 2) to uncover the different messages received about sexuality in growing up, gay or straight, 3) to re-evaluate what is acceptable to say out loud, and admit to oneself, 4) to trust others.

At the beginning of any conversation about sexuality there will most likely be a consensus that in their early childhood experiences most individuals in the groups confronted harmful social exclusions in their everyday relationships. Therefore, a welcoming space needs to be created in the church or meeting halls to welcome strangers, both heterosexual and homosexual.

Within the debate about homosexuality and the Christian faith there exist many ideologies that justify an “us” vs “them” mentality. Alternatively, holy conversations invite one to reflect on the specifics of one’s faith in God along with one’s understanding of homosexuality and move away from this negative ideology. To include myself in a holy conversation with others is itself a demonstration of faith that God has already included me in a spiritual conversation.

Western sexuality is contextualized in a variety of ways. That is, for some it is both something exploited and something not to be spoken about in polite society. And, for others, there is a transcendent aspect to sexuality

that has the potential for an interpersonal and spiritual connection. Holy conversations seek to discover how human sexuality, straight or queer, is part of the expression of Christian theology.

Pastoral struggle and theological reflection

The pastoral context provides an opportunity for Christians in good faith to struggle over homosexual matters. Some contentious issues that arise through holy conversations are:

- Homosexuality is not God's wish for humanity.
- No self-avowed practicing homosexual shall be ordained.
- Homosexuality is a perversion of nature and an unnatural affection.
- Some Christians, and Christian churches, officially affirm and celebrate the ministry of gay and lesbian persons and confront the injustices of homophobia, sexism and racism.
- Some Christians accept all sexuality as a gift from God that can be expressed in public relationships.
- Unrecognized by many local churches is the “Welcoming Church” network that supports the inclusion and affirmation of LGBT individuals in ministry and local congregations.

To my mind, such conversations must engage philosophical questions and must include an assessment of the Hellenized tradition that has traditionally grounded the doctrine and dogma of the Christian faith. To this end, a holy conversation will not reserve the discussion to “God's will” in the queer pastoral struggle, but rather inquire into the queer life-style in the presence of God.

There are desired pastoral goals within a theological reflection, such as: 1) to discover (construct) tools to discuss sexual issues, 2) to further the exploration between religion and sexuality, 3) to be open to the stories of others, 4) to articulate an appropriate personal theological understanding of homosexuality within theology. One unanswered question, or perhaps the question has yet to be posed, is: Will the pastoral theological approach effect a change in the traditional doctrine of the church?

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ECLECTIC REFLECTIONS

During my research for this book, I collected certain bits of information that, while I think they are appropriate to the topic at hand, I did not include in any great detail in any of the essays. So, I have collected them here and will let the reader decide if they are of any significance to the topic at hand.

1st datum: *The lack of universally accepted social conventions.*

Werner Brock in writing his *Contemporary German Philosophy* and Mel Thompson in his *Eastern Philosophy* both make mention of the significance of the above observation that they took into account in writing their books. The phenomenon is common to the philosophies of the East and the West and has had its influence on the development of their philosophical approaches. Brock writes:

For Philosophy, in its fullest sense, was in Germany regarded not as the business of private individuals who undertook either keen logical investigations, or metaphysical speculations which although penetrating were limited to their own experience, but as the work of those who felt themselves bound to give to the men of their age an interpretation of the world and an explanation of the principles of conduct, and who, for this double purpose, sought after truth.

This conception of philosophy is to be partly attributed to the lack of the political unity, to the absence of a dominant class and to the fact that the character of the German people had not been formed by any one national ideal. For this kind of philosophy was able by an insight into principles of

an interpretation of the world and of the conduct of life, to offer to the individual an inner certainty and clearness which could compensate for the lack of universally accepted social conventions.

They have, so to speak, to ask the world whether what has been accomplished in Germany, but has hitherto exercised little influence outside that country, does not contain something of value to the other great nations...and point in conclusion to the alternative between a philosophy that is only one of schools and a philosophy that is universal (p. xv).

Brock’s “inner certainty and clearness which could compensate for the lack of universally accepted social conventions” is what I hope to have offered queer individuals through these essays.

Towards the completion of this collection of essays, I came across the following observation concerning the expansion of the original understanding of phenomenology, or as it is known outside Europe, Continental Philosophy. Schroeder and Al-Saji (2017) make the following comment in their Introduction to the proceedings of the 55th annual meeting of the Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy. “The title of this issue, ‘Placing Transcontinental Philosophy,’ attempts to capture a sense of the expanding diversity and depth of continental philosophy in the new millennium as it is practiced and advanced by SPEP. The neologism *transcontinental philosophy* signifies not only the growing global reach but also the profound developments of continental philosophy as it has been taken up through other cultural standpoints and linguistic orientations....Taking on philosophical standpoints from African American, Chicana, East Asian, and Indian cultures, the borders of Western philosophy not only are expanded but are also called into question as such.”

His observations are not confined to one country on one continent, but he considers two countries on two continents.

For his part, Mel Thompson (1999) has addressed much the same phenomenon from the perspective of a “geography of ideas.”⁸⁴

Ideas not only develop, they also move. Carried along by trade or religion, they find themselves applied to different cultures in separate geographical areas and subsequent developments reflect that geographical separation. By and large, in studying Eastern Thought, we are looking at the products of two very different geographical and cultural areas: India and China. In this book, we shall be primarily concerned with the approach taken by each philosophy, and the fundamental ideas that developed within it, but it is important to recognize that — however rationally justified — changes in society, the moving of ideas from one area to another and the passing of time all have an important part to play in the ever-changing pattern of ideas.

In the concluding chapter on Zen, he writes:

In most of the material we have looked at in this book, it has been clear that the concepts and background are culturally conditioned, and that parallels with western thought can be rather tenuous....Naturally this is also true to some extent with Zen — it has influenced and been influenced by Japanese culture. On the other hand, the attempts to get beyond concepts, and its rejection of doctrines and rituals, gives it an immediate claim to be genuinely global.⁸⁵

⁸⁴ *Eastern Philosophy*, p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Eastern Philosophy*, p. 230.

2nd datum: *Christianity: Queer Pasts, Queer Futures?*⁸⁶

Lisa Isherwood writes in the Abstract of her article, “The paper is not attempting to find a queer past in order to justify a queer present and solidify a queer future but rather to suggest that fluidity and unexpected outcomes should be at the heart of the Christian enterprise. It also follows that if the categories which have been used to exclude are themselves queered then Christianity becomes a far more inclusive way of living.” Is it a matter of “queering” the categories or dehellenizing them to achieve a more inclusive way of living? I wonder.

Queer theology is a new discipline according to Isherwood. It is an “untidy” method to expose “the bits” that do not fit into a neat system. The “incarnational nature” of Christianity alters one’s perceptions and the ways reality is understood. The world and divinity are opened to fluid ways of being both human and divine in queer theology, she maintains.

Traditional “theology is not enough: in itself it is insufficient as a discipline to provide us with a basis for explaining critically the reality in which we live.” Had theology not been influence by Plato or Aristotle, but by Chinese or African thinkers, we would be doing theology in a different way, she suggests. A queer theoretical framework is doing theology in a different way and theology would be destabilized. In other words, that which is marginalized in Christianity is ultimately brought to the fore through a queer framework, she notes. Dehellenization does the same I suggest. But not via destabilization, a negative experience, but by a positive creation of the future of belief as suggested by Leslie Dewart’s philosophical perspective.

⁸⁶ *Horizonte*, Belo Horizonte, vol. 13, n. 39, pp. 1345-74, (July/September, 2015).

“Queer” is a verb, not a noun, she maintains. To queer, is to destabilize. Alternatively, I suggest that “to dehellenize” is to re-stabilize and “make tidy” our lives and the way in which we understand reality and our claims to identity. Queer theology, to date at least, is not part of any institutional system. Rather, it is a movement, “an alliance of people who question the construction of theology” who intend to unveil the suppressed face of God within traditional Western understanding. As I see it, a “queer philosophy” is needed to achieve this unveiling. If not a queer philosophy, at least a dehellenized one.

When queer theologians focus on the human body, they “tell very complex and challenging stories and these now become the stuff of the salvific tale.” The queer rendering of the traditional notion of “incarnation” reveals neglected issues that need attention in theological discussions. The traditional answers found in Western metaphysics are challenged and we are encouraged to move beyond our comfort zone in the Western metaphysical way of thinking. We no longer look to the creedal formulas as formulated by Hellenist thinking for answers to our unsettling questions. Further, through a queer philosophical enquiry we can enter into the unexamined corners of theology, she summarizes. Dehellenization does the same.

Dehellenization reveals the co-creator status of the individual. For Isherwood, “the glorious abandonment of the divine into the flesh” and its attendant passionate dance as a queer experience achieves the same results. By this she seems to suggest that persons, as incarnated individuals, establish themselves as co-creative and co-redemptive agents in their flesh. Following the traditional Christian understanding she maintains that the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth have redemptive meaning for all humanity for all time.

Where her queer theology endorses the notion of unstable identities, I would encourage a dehellenized notion of stable identities. That is to say that I require horizons to identify myself and construct my personality. On this point it appears that she and I disagree. Rather than subvert the existing culture, as I see it, our bodies may create a new culture, retaining the good from the former culture where, in her words, “a real sense private acts of intimacy create our world — they draw us into the social and the politics embedded in it.”

This ultimately brings the theologian to the question of the “mono divine” as Isherwood expresses it. “I believe that if we wish to move from queering theology to having a queer Christianity then tackling the mono divine in our traditions is the next step.” Dehellenization is nothing less than this, but from a positive point of view. It is not unhelleneization. Despite my reservations about the possible negative aspects of Isherwood’s queer Christian theology, due to its newness perhaps, I do agree generally with her perspective on theology. I have no hesitation when she concludes: “Tackling the implications of this move [beyond traditional monotheism] perhaps forms part of a queer future for theologians who work within a Christian frame.”

3rd datum: “*But in philosophical reflection gender is hardly ever relevant.*”

I was well into writing my book when the above sentence caught my attention. I pondered what Daniel Guerrière could have meant in writing this in his *Phenomenology of the Truth Proper to Religion* (p.15) and I came up with the following reflection.

I think that many people are unclear about the difference between the *activity* of sexuality and the *identification* of sexuality. They believe that the activity

of sexuality creates the identity of sexuality. They therefore assume that “queerness” is possible, and they are inspired to “create,” or identify it in an individual. And, my point is that, since such people know no better, their ignorance facilitates their success in naming (realizing) this condition. For instance, they scrutinize the human sciences, hard and soft, in order to discover particular identities not previously in the consciousness of the individual or collective consciousness of society.

If these individuals took into account the role of the sciences they would realize that the dynamic for producing a queer identity is a self-oriented and causal process — in other words, “queering” is a process that is only proper to philosophy, and not to the contemporary technological sciences. They should realize that the sciences, as such, cannot create or name anyone’s identity, only explain their behaviour. However, their unawareness of such an impossibility gives them a paradoxical advantage. Queer identity, mistakenly conceived, is the kind of notion in the mind that can be consciously and socially recognized and subsequently accepted as “fact” even when it is merely a psychological fiction. In other words, they have rendered the notion of homosexuality a concrete social “fact” in opposition to the concrete social “fact” of heterosexual identity; when the only “fact” is that humans are sexual beings.

In the final analysis the social sciences do not create a true counterpart to traditional heterosexual identity. They do, however, support an illusion, or psychological fiction (a type of ideology) in the public forum that has the power to bring about social change — whether positive or negative has yet to be determined.

Now, why should queerness be so-created? For what ends should it exist? These questions are not likely to be adequately answered either by scientists, who are so confused themselves that they have conceived the very

idea of creating queerness. Nor are they likely to be answered satisfactorily by philosophers who are eager to promote such a social scientific ideology. Dare I suggest that the artificially conceived need of an independent queer ideology may be due to an inadequate philosophical anthropology of sexuality?

§

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